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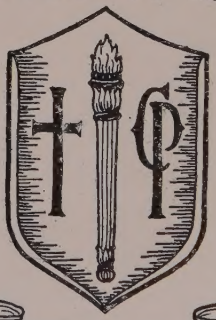

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Mrs. John G. Howard

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PHEIDIAS

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College of the Pacific
Stockton, Calif.

PHEIDIAS

BY
JOHN GALEN HOWARD

NEW YORK
THE MACMILLAN COMPANY
MCMXXIX

College of the Pacific
Stockton, Calif.

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TO

JOHN G. NEIHARDT

POET AND FRIEND

"THAT I BE VEHICLE OF GOD TO MAN"

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PHEIDIAS

PROLOGUE

PHEIDIAS

PROLOGUE

PANTARKES, OF OLYMPIA, AT ATHENS,
TO THE SONS OF PHEIDIAS, OF ATHENS, AT OLYMPIA.

For your sakes, and perhaps posterity's,
I think it is incumbent upon me
To make these things of record. Visiting
Your father, my beloved father-friend,
On the occasion of the throwing open
Of his great masterwork the Parthenon,
I asked him to relate to me his life
And how he had attained his mastery;
For as a young man, though his intimate,
Loving his character and work achieved,
I knew but little of his early story.
He was most gracious, and indeed most glad,
It seemed to me, to open out his heart
At frequent intervals as leisure chanced;
And I, when I was once again alone,
Wrote out from memory what he had said
Close as I could to his own words. To you,
Whose sacred duties at Olympia
About your father's Zeus kept you away,
I think a record of his words will be
A valued treasure, though my skill fall short.

PHEIDIAS

I

ATHENS

PHEIDIAS

I

ATHENS

My father Charmides, his father too
And his, were sculptors, sprung from Daedalus,
Our tribe's and sculpture's first progenitor.
You know our way at Athens — sons are sons
Not in blood only but in handicraft,
Passing tradition always on, and so
Accumulating skill from birth to birth.
Even the uninspired thus profit; some,
Gifted with vision, or, though blind, a strain
Of urgence in their veins, make names that live.
And when the vision and the urgence join,
The gods may well be jealous.
I was born
High on the road to the old citadel,
Which was not then, as now, imperial,
But just a rough old hill-town, clustering
For safety up the crag, and drawing skirts
Away from fouling new town round about.
They fetched all water from a single spring
That gushed beneath the wall, the Clepsydra;
Near this a ledge stood off beside the road,
And gave to our old house a narrow shelf

On which to hug the rock-side. Up, and down,
Sheer cliff; but southward was a scrap of yard,
Half hidden by the shaft, set all askew,
Of an old Hermes, darkly overhung
By intertangling branches of a bay,
And floored with flagging worn so deep and smooth
It was, to me, a heady pledging-cup,
Lifted a little from the throng-brimmed path,
From which to drink my Athens.
All day long
And night long there was music from that stream,
Whose never ceasing burden was of life.
My sleep was calmed by its accustomedness,
Disturbed but by its pausing. I believe
Processions thus were bred into my bone.
For as a baby I would sit there, dumb
And heedless of the house, to watch the way
At every chance. I cared for nothing more
For plaything or playfellow than the street.
They thought me dreamy and self-centred, useless
About the house, because when they would set
Some task, as I grew older, I would shirk,
Or hide, play sick, do anything, to run
And get a sip of that sweet river, life,
That swept and eddied down and up the hill.

I loved its outer aspect, loved it much,
And yet my passion for it was far more
For a remote but troubling call it had

And deeper meaning to me. While my eyes
Delighted in the colours and the forms,
The movement, and the personalities,
My thoughts were always, underneath, engaged
Constructing complexes to unify
Heterogeneous, conflicting things
Into a type, and see my Athens whole
And one.
And this was true of every day;
But most of all, of those great days of days
When Athens' self took thought to unify
Her outer aspect, in processions formed
To celebrate the goddess. Then I saw
Almost in actual reality
The living soul of Athens, simplified
And strengthened, heightened into one divine
And permanent expression. Even more
This double sight — of utmost surface joy
In life just as the forms before me looked,
And of a brooding urge to reconstruct
The scheme and see it, not as things appeared,
But as they inwardly and truly were —
This doubleness of vision even more
Wrought and intensified itself in me
When from a distance I could catch a glimpse
Of the procession, as it were compact
And trimmed of non-essentials.
At our door,
Close up against the corner of the house,

There stood a mighty bay tree, from whose crotch
And through whose jealous leafage I could see,
Over the roof, much of the winding road
That mounted from the market place, on which
The stately pomp advanced. The polished trunk
Of silken, self-respecting gray was soiled
And scarified by the determined heels
It knew so well the way of — heels that knew
So well each comfortable clutch. When came
A day of festival I early went
To my high house under the rustling leaves,
To rid myself of nagging, and survey
In lonely ecstasy the splendid thing
That smoothly slipped and serpentined along,
So gay, so solemn, and so musical.

I loved my city most of all, the days
When she was choicely decked and dedicated.
I loved the order into which the free
And busy populace had curbed themselves,
Gladly abandoning their own concerns
And sinking self in service. In my breast
That satisfying order and its range
Of beautiful significance became
My secret symbol of divinity,
Touching, deep down in me, a vibrant chord
That made me tremble with its exquisite
But troubled yearning. It was like desire
In one whose sense is unawakened yet

To love-delight, but reaches blindly out
To some far feeling, sweet and terrible,
And overwhelmingly beyond control.

And I was conscious of that likeness, even
In those premonitory days when love
Was yet unconscious; for my dreams were filled
With haunting images; and often fear —
Of what, I knew not — would awaken me
Deep in the night, and I would lie there, cold
And lonesome in anxiety, the steps
Of the belated passers were so few
And uncompanioning. I dreamed of snakes,
Oh, often, in those days of early youth,
When all my forces were a tangled skein
Of clueless tendencies; the warp and woof
Of life — its visions and desires — its pattern —
As yet unfixed, or not to be deciphered.
Sometimes I dreamed that Athens was an asp
That through a clasping forest sought its mate
The serpent of Athena, which dissolved
Into the pranked procession up the hill,
Strangled and held along the peopled way
Into the temple. Or the sudden thing
Became my father, whose omnipotence
Drove ruthlessly through portals of the shrine
To reach Athena, hopelessly beyond.
Or else it seemed the serpent-thrusting crowd,
Gilded and painted, swooned into myself,

Who tore the veil before the goddess' face
And sought her luring yet unyielded lips.
Always Athena and her secret shrine —
Her seeking serpent the processioned priests —
Its strength to strike — my father and myself —
And all commingling powers and ecstasies,
Forbidden, evanescent, longed for, vain.
But oftenest recurring was a dream
Of life — of love — of wisdom — or of God
(All undistinguished, for they seemed but one),
A wing-borne serpent that was I myself,
Soaring through boundless aether to some realm
Beyond, beyond. — From flight I woke in fear. . . .

My father died when I was yet a boy,
Even before I had been freed from toils
Of women's quarters, where they filled my cup
With cloying sweetness. I felt more alone,
Pampered and prinked in their warm custody,
Than in my tree from which horizons swept,
Where I was lonely merely in the flesh
And not in vision. Always through those years
Of later childhood and of early youth
And adolescence I adored the form
Of my dead father. Charmides was young,
Not much beyond first full maturity,
When he was taken from us, and my soul
Was mingled with the memory of him

And of his greatness. He was beautiful —
The rounded figure of a joyous god,
Supreme, benignant. His impassioned face —
Perfection in its form — was glorious
In colour too, a burnished autumn fruit
Of ruddy splendours. Over his great brow
The bronze-brown locks close clustered, and his beard
(It tickled when he kissed me, down my neck)
Was a big brushy forest where his lips
Blossomed like tiger-lilies. I recall
How like a live thing seemed his mouth to me,
A living, loving language of delight;
I hung on its mobility — a smile,
A word, a laugh, and oh, its tuneful thunder — ;
Superbly modeled, underneath the beard,
And, in expression, sensitive and strong
At once — Apollo in its gentleness,
And Zeus in virile grandeur. How he loved
The laugh of life — and how he made life laugh!
And laughter lives its life in mouth and eyes.
If from his lips rolled thunder, from those orbs
Came a live lightning, changeful with his moods
Nor twice the same. There never was a glance
So like to liquid warmth when he was kind,
So icy cold in anger. Not so often,
Nevertheless, the latter was his mood;
I knew him gentle mostly. Yet be sure
He kept his house in order like a king,

Unruthless in his rule, though absolute.
I loved the lion music of his voice
When I displeased him — the good-humoured troll
With which he tossed displeasure off. To me
Who grew in such a sunshine he was God,
And God himself I saw in his disguise.
I knew I had his love as he had mine,
And we were comrades after he was gone
As in his presence.
How this filial love,
This adoration of a memory,
Merged with my mystic worship of Athena
And with the longed-for love as yet unknown,
And these with zest for all-embracing Zeus
Who in himself summed wisdom, power, and love —
All this you must imagine as you will;
You cannot doubt the psychic chemistry. —

It was from Charmides I caught the trick,
Before I talked, of how to handle tools;
It came by instinct and inheritance
Partly, no doubt, but I associate
Essentially with him and with his hand
Its ready usage. As I learned to speak
I learned to model, aping the sure strokes
Of thoughtless manual expression, as,
By tongue, I followed his unstudied words.
But he did more than be a mere example —
His will compelled me, roused me to attempt,

However I might fail, a higher task
Than merely copying, though perfectly.
"Never be satisfied with what you see;
Always add something of yourself," he said.
I could not grasp his meaning, but I felt
Its urgence, and endeavoured to obey
Always his fatherly command. No gift
Could he have made me that had half the value,
For the determining and heightening
Of all the powers within me, of those words,
Oracular alike in their content
And their obscurity. And when he died,
Leaving but modest fortune and, alas,
So little save the promise of his art,
He left, in character and memory,
A rich inheritance. I never knew
A sense of worship and unselfish love
More keen, more passionate, than I have laid
Upon his altar. Men have thought it strange
That I should sign my Zeus with his name too —
"Pheidias son of Charmides made me" —
But you will understand. I owed it to him.

After my father's death the studio
Was shut a while, with his unfinished work
And all the tools and things left as they were,
Untouched. My mother yielded to her grief
More than most wives, for there had been great
love

Between those two. It was no chilly pact
Such as we see, arranged by others. He,
As one who had been privileged to view
And judge the beauty of the Athens maids
To bear the goddess' vestment on the day
Of the procession, had made choice of her
And she of him, in love. And they had lived
The life of lovers. She could hardly bear
To have him leave her for a day, and when
He disappeared forever from her sight
She was sore smitten. So the house was closed,
A man left guarding it, whilst all of us —
My mother, my two brothers, and the slaves —
Went to a farm we had, out on the road
To Mount Pentelicus, to rusticate.

Those were the days when war was in the air.
The Persians were expected any day.
From isle to isle they stepped across the sea
And were already at Eretria,
A stone's throw over from us, as it seemed.
And I am sure my mother would have feared
To venture from the city were it not
That grief distracted her, and made the house
At home seem utterly unbearable,
And old associations cruel wounds.
Hers was an ardent nature, instantly
Performing what was uppermost in mind,
And passionate intensely both in love

And in religion; in her grief, intense
Beyond all bounds, her single thought escape
From the accustomed precincts, hallowed all
With passion, maddened all with loss. For me,
I scarcely sensed his passing. My child love
Grew deeper, more ideal, now he was
No longer with us. Daily sacrifice
At the new shrine amused and comforted
Rather than pained me, and I felt him near,
Nearer and dearer, for the sacred rite.
My mother could not understand my mood,
Though so young-boy-like, and we grew estranged.
She made me feel unnatural, at fault
In some way, I could not see how. No doubt
Her sense of contrariety in me
Was emphasized and made more hard to bear
By dereliction of my older brother
Panaenus, who had given her great pain,
Refusing to pursue our father's art
Of sculpture; for already he was set
On painter's work. And thus it was that we,
Who had most need to cling more close, drew off
And looked back at each other. So those weeks
Of Athens' tortured waiting tortured us,
Mostly unconscious of the public doings
In our own tragedy. My great reprieve
Was to escape from such a strange new pain
Of presence, more distressing than my loss,
And wander up the mountain all alone.

Our place was at the edge of the long plain,
Near where the brush began, and the strewn rocks
That made my perfect playgrounds. Farther up,
The rocks grew into ledges, good to scale;
The ledges into cliffs, beyond the powers
Of urchins of my size, but tempting ground
To test one's growth with, for Panaenus once
Had clambered to the ridge just where the rock
Was steepest and the foothold least. . . . The smell
Of the whole place is in my nostrils now,
As of Hymettus, rich with bee-bloom brush,
Sweet aromatic. . . . Half-way up the slope
Were marble quarries, from which blocks were brought
To Athens for the cutters; which indeed
Explains the choice of our old olive farm,
Hardly worth while to cultivate, but near
And most convenient to the working-ground
Of my great-grandsire, who laid out the place.
He had some great commission to fulfil
That took him often there to supervise
The roughing of his marble. And to me
It was a place of visions. Where the scurf
And lichen of untouched gray ledges broke
Into the chiseled snow, began a realm
Of mystic wonders. Gods and heroes there
Had secret being, ready to be called
To visibility. I saw their forms
Out of the mass emerging. All day long

I asked no better than to linger there
Creating my companions, edging round,
As sunshine swept a wing of shadow round,
To shun the heat and dazzle.
Then, one day
(I had been dreaming there as usual
But strayed a little farther up the rocks),
Over the plain I saw the soldiers running
And beating round the flank, to Marathon.
There flashed two thoughts, as one, upon my mind:
"The Persians must be landing over there —
Soldiers are just like figures on a jar." —
For as I said, I never saw a thing
That touched me deeply but I saw it twice:
Intensely as it was in outward form
With inner meaning part of its true form;
And plastically unified, the whole
Conventionally rhythmical and flat. —
I scrambled up the crumble till I saw
From a commanding boulder how the swarm
Of soldier-grasshoppers had filled the road
Around the mountain, like an anthill loosed.
The gooseflesh went all over me. Today —
This hour — this minute — Persians were at hand! —

The man in me woke suddenly, and off
Over the trackless wilderness I put
To be part of it. Apron-strings again

For me? I felt the bond snap. Marathon
Marked my enfranchisement from childish things.

Over the brow when I looked out to sea,
The white-capped blue was painted far and wide
With Persia. All along the beach their boats
Were emptying. The plain was bare. Our men
Held off. But I could glimpse them gathering
Under the Oaks of Heracles. And there
I hastened. Hellas throbbed in me. And life —
Life sang in me. I might have been afraid;
But not at all — I never thought of fear.
I was exhilarated. Eagerly
I pushed into the rough crowd. Suddenly
I saw a man I knew — my father's friend —
Named Aeschylus, a poet through and through
But a good fighter. When he saw my face
He bore down on me like a thunderbolt,
Though kindness mixed with shocked astonishment:
"What business have you here — a boy like you?
Go home. Tell mother that I sent you. Go!"

But when he saw how fixed I was, and that
I would not budge, he softened down a little,
And let me stay to tend him. "Safer so,"
He mused, "now that you're really here, than try
To get home safely in the darkness."
Night,
In truth, already was at hand. I slept —

Or rather lay without sleep — side by side
With him, spoon-fashion, through the troubled dark,
The eve of Marathon. He sang the lines
From his Unbound Prometheus, where he cries
In anguish of the vulture at his heart.
It seemed to be the voice of Hellas, torn
By Asian beaks, but prophesying soon
Deliverance. (I knew the lines again
Long after when he gave the finished play.)
There, in the darkness just before the dawn —
Dawn of the ordeal — the intoning thrilled
As if through Hellas breathed the voice of God.
And then he asked me to recite the lines
Of Homer, where Achilles drags the body
Of Hector round the walls. "So may we drag
The Persian!" someone cried; at that a shout
Went up: "So may the Persian's corpse be dragged!"
I had to say it over once again,
My voice all choked, before they were content.
I also gave the capture of the town;
What else I cannot now recall; I knew
The whole from end to end, nor needed spur.
Aeschylus was much pleased to have me do it.
He made as if to mother me, and threw
His mantle all about and drew me close.
Till then I always thought him too austere,
But from that night I loved him — he betrayed
A warmth of human feeling that, to me,
He never showed else.

Soon the morning came —
Sooner than I expected — and the day.
I had to yield to Aeschylus' command
And start for home before the battle joined;
But I went slow, and stopped at every step,
To watch the fight the heroes fought that day. —

And in the midst I saw Miltiades
Calling his men to action, he himself
Epitome of conflict — might, made man.
That instant flashed like lightning on my sight
And fixed his form in fire. —
Years afterward
Great Kimon once — Miltiades' own son —
Hearing me telling of my vision, swore
That when his time came he would have me make
Miltiades just as I saw him then,
In bronze, with gods and heroes like himself.
That was the starting of my first command,
The votive gift to Delphi — thirteen gods,
Including the Miltiades. The whole
Booty of Marathon had not done more
To rouse the sculptor in me. Pericles
Was almost jealous — jealous as Pericles
Could be! — that I already had begun
To travel my life's highway, leaving him
To come on after — to his greater goal.
He did not wait long.

All of this, you know,
Was long, long afterwards, of course. — But where —
Where was I? Oh! Well, you will be surprised,
I scarcely can remember any more
Of Marathon, although I witnessed it
From start to finish. Do you wonder why? —
Perhaps the complications of the fight
Removed it from my plastic sympathies;
And I was hungry, weary, and engrossed —
Even with Marathon before my eyes —
With visions more eventual.
One thing
There was, though, that stayed with me, I forgot
To tell you of the day before. I saw —
Though at the moment but half sensed, so hot
Was I to see the Persians — as I ran
Around the northmost buttress of the cliffs
I saw where the long mountain path debouched
That fed Plataeans to us. Down the steep
The channeled path ran full with single file —
The thousand men that stood to us that day
For all of Hellas' backing. I can say
I loved Plataeans for that cockiness.
"Death or our liberties," they seemed to shout
With every stride. A manly lot they were,
That Hellas' handful. Ever after that
I looked for an occasion to express
My deep devotion. So I took and made
A Pallas for their town, at my first chance

To show my love; a wooden thing it was —
They had but little gold, and less had I. —

The bees were booming home when I emerged
From head-high heather near the loud corral.
I quietly walked round into the court,
Quite unconcerned. The game was surely worth
The price I thought to pay. My mother gave
One all-devouring look, which instantly
Changed from its anguish to indignant wrath.
Next moment, though, she had me in her arms
Hugging me passionately.
I know now
What she had been through — would I might have
spared
That torture to her; but the break had come
Inevitably, unforeseen; too young,
As the world reckons these things, but I was,
Remember, forward, half of me a child
But half a man, though man in the green shoot.

No more of women's quarters for me, though.
My mother sensed a maleness in my mood
Which had not cast a shadow on my lip
But which her heart divined. And she was wise,
And none too hasty, in the change of rule
That banished me. Already in my veins
A new, strange force was moving. Banishment
Did but announce it.

In our home there was,
Among the household, a devoted slave
Who with her child, a baby at the breast,
Had come from Chersonese. Miltiades
Had taken them in one of his campaigns
Against the Scythians, and sent them down
To Athens to my father as a gift.
"The woman is magnificent," he wrote;
"She should be useful in your art. The child
May likely be less helpful, but I thought
It would not do to take it from her breast.
The father lost his life fighting for them
Against a crowd. It was a splendid sight
To see him battle — and to see him fall.
They come of noble stock."
In our small home
They had become not merely valued friends,
But really members of the family.
She had adored my father, served him well
As model, was an angel everywhere
About the house. For years she was my nurse.
I had a feeling for her close akin
To filial, yet quite different in that
She was objective and impersonal —
Though so maternal, yet not part of self
Like one's own flesh and blood. Her gentle voice,
Sliding and skating over our smooth Greek,
Gave her a foreignness whose novel charm,

While it endeared, removed her. And her way
Of taking time to grow up to a mood,
But once up to it faithful — most un-Greek —
A grateful foil to our swift fickleness.
She had a gift of silence as to things
She did to make one happy; one discovered
Long afterward perhaps — or not at all,
No doubt, much oftener — how she had laid
The lines directly to one's good, although
Afraid to take its bloom by breathing on it.
We Greeks would advertise and get our pay.
These foreign ways of hers and her bright hues
Of sunny tawniness, amid the blacks
And terracottas of our household else,
Set her so far apart there was a blur
Over my feeling for her that made love
A naturally unsuspected thing.
Yet while I still was small, romance
Deep-penetrating tinctured my delight
In her attentions. In my bath her touch
Sent strange and sweet sensations down my spine,
Unlike my mother's. It was ecstasy
Worth the high price of bathing, to endure
Her soft, strong handling. A freemasonry
Instinctively grew up between us two;
We knew, we knew, what we would never tell,
While there was nothing we should hide at all.
And it became the custom of the house
That only she might bathe me. Custom long

Can silence what, except for its own stop,
Would cry aloud. How deaf and blind we are
To the precursive secrecies of love,
Which lies asleep, scarcely asleep, in lives
From the beginning; love, which stirs and dreams
In the deep soil of childhood, putting forth
Unseen and unsuspected; love, which is
The basic principle of life itself!

That slow, sure, year-long, childhood-long approach
Led on inevitably to one end.
It was a stimulating influence
That I responded to, and throve apace
Under, upbuilding to a towering crest
Of fateful consummation. All my powers
Developed very early, even before
My father died; he loved to show me off
To friends for what he called my imagery,
And for a certain ease and aptitude
That I was born with, or had gained by grace.
But this fore-blossoming of every sort
Was largely due to one who was a warmth
That lured my ardour on from boy to man,
I quite unconscious of it, unaware
Of anything but that — I knew not what.
And my advancement to the outer court
Quite startled me; although my pedagogue
Soon took it on himself, with a sly grin,
To send a needle home. I understood.

Not all at once, though, did I realize
That there was something sweetly undefined
And strangely unavowed between my nurse
And me. The weeks and months went swiftly by —
A year or two, or several, no doubt.
The old freemasonry of silence grew
And budded out between us, till it bloomed
Into a something neither of us faced,
Or cared to face, in frankness. She put on
A manner to me. I was conscious too.
Each planned in secret to avoid the place
Where at a certain hour the other might
Most likely be; and when we found our paths,
By shunning ways accustomed, ran together
In unaccustomed, we would make excuse
Whose conscious needlessness embarrassed us.

It was a long and arduous ascent
To climb from the child's level, where she moved
As but a member, though so dear a one,
Of home and family, to the high ground
From which as vantage I might look on her
Broadly and freely as another person,
And mark the difference that set her off
Alone from family and from myself.—
But in the revolution of the years
There came a time when I could see her clearly
As of that other sort I knew to be,
And longed to prove it to be true, but still

Could not quite credit. Sure! Impossible! —
There was a drop of Oedipus in me
Who aimed so near a mother shafts that slanted
Nevertheless to unforbidden wounds.
I wandered chartless and unshepherded
Strange thoughts' wild pastures.
I had grown to be
A big athletic youth by then, a man
In all but years; and yet my modesty,
And, too, my drawing to that special one
Whom her own modesty had kept aloof
For years, whilst I developed, held me back.
I might not ever have been rash enough
To take initiative, for you know well
How lads are mostly led into their first
Experience. I loathed my pedagogue,
He was so coarse in his allusiveness
To love. His vileness made me hesitate
And draw back at the thought: "If this sweet thing
Should prove so loathly commonplace, so gross,
And so — so loveless — I should die of it."
(That was my attitude.) "And yet to die
Is all I long for if this wondrous thing
Prove worthless. It is love or death, for me."

So the days hastened while I looked and longed,
But made no move to pluck the tempting fruit.
"The woman is magnificent;" so wrote
Miltiades, in sending her, when she

Was rather girl than woman. Now her time
Was at the peak of its magnificence.
You love my Aphrodite, who reclines
In Peitho's arms in the east pediment.
I used my memory of first desire
In modeling the figure. Nothing short
Of the divine itself could have surpassed
Her beauty. And her character so well,
So exquisitely, fitted her fair form,
So like it in its gracious lines and soft
Full measure that it was impossible
To think of them apart. I never loved,
I never could love, but the loved-one's soul,
Like hers, were beautiful — nor but the forms
That shrined the lovely soul were lovely too. —
You know, Pantarkes, how my heart responds
To things in keeping. All things in their place. —

Fate had resolved to melt the modest lovers.
April was on; the year's great festival
Was celebrating in the theatre
Of Dionysus; and our house, of course,
Must never miss it — one of those old plays
These dainty times have mostly cast aside.
Archaic let us call it kindly, crude
And frank, with unashamed obscenity,
But full of wholesome pungence just the same,
And popular. There were the dances, songs,
And recitations, all the clownish tricks,

Grotesque and broad, of the Old Comedy.
And was it relished? Gods! the wild applause
When, at the climax, came a ribald crew
Acting, with masquerade preposterous,
A most suggestive farce of Sowing-Time.
A virus as of vintage galloped through
One's veins, under the spurring springtime sun,
Corroborating spring there, riotous
Without suggestion, cataclysmic with it.
Above the scenic Bacchanal a wave
Of wine swept flooding up the theatre
And rosing the tense faces. As for me,
I swam beyond my depth in the swift warmth
That in its rush submerged me — drowning —
drowned.
The women round us made as if they were
Quite taken by surprise at the bold show,
And hid their faces, tittering. But they,
It seemed to me, liked it no less than I,
Who loathed and loved it in one glutton gulp.

The action softened down before the end,
And from the faces ebbed the crimson tide;
But all my skin was tingling underneath
My garment, light as gossamer, which weighed
Like lead upon me. In my body flamed
An inextinguishable fire.
The crowd
Began at once to jostle and to talk

A keyed-up jargon. All our family
Put on a chaste sedateness, chattering
Inconsequential nothings. Two of us
Alone were wordless and aloof. We went,
After the play, in silence round the hill
Homeward, our eyes avoiding eyes, our thoughts
Avoiding words. We kept as far apart
As walking warranted — the safest course,
We felt; I felt, at least.
Within the court
The women left us, fluttering straight on
To their own quarters, all without a word.
But as we parted, one deep pair of eyes
Rested on mine a moment, and there ran
At last between us two an understanding.

That night she came to me in my small room
And I learned love in all its ecstasy.

PHEIDIAS

II

ARGOS

PHEIDIAS

II

ARGOS

My school days, as I now look back at them,
Seem strangely arid. Something I suppose
I must have learned, for I was given all
That Athens had to offer in that way,
And I went through and came out from the mill
Without disgrace; but if I am to judge
From emptiness of memory, without
Much acquisition. School did not take hold
Upon my conscious interest. I slipped,
Rather than made my way along, distraught
By things that were much better worth my while.
In love I found my normal atmosphere,
The vital medium of life itself
That spurred, that calmed, that set me on again.
And sculpture — on the side, to schoolmen's thought,
But in the middle of the road, to mine —
Stood as the always most desired of goals.

Yet schooling must have opened up at least
New paths, new vistas, and a broader field
Of youthful operations than the small,

Perhaps the over-cultured one, of home.
If I learned little, and that little ill,
In the respectable and ancient way
Of stipulated lessons and forced work,
I found the way to lasting friendships there,
And learned to face a not too kindly world.

Among the lads of something like my age
Whose lines were laid with mine were Pericles
And Sophocles, who were my intimate,
Inseparable comrades; and two more,
Magnes and Menon, who stood just outside
Our inmost circle. Sometimes they came in,
When they and we agreed in thinking well;
And sometimes they stayed out, or were put out
With boyish ruthlessness, when they revealed
Strains that were thought less well of by us three.
Our view of life was different from theirs —
Not better necessarily, you know.
Though most unlike, they both were reckoned odd
At times by us, not quite our sort of thing.
We were exclusive on but slender grounds.
If you should trace our boyhood prejudice
You would, I think, find no more active cause
Than traits that were a little difficult
In Menon's disposition; and a dose,
A grown-up dose, of griping ridicule
In Magnes' mixture of morality,
Imagination, judgment, and pure fun.

I had been working, all those later years
After my father's death, outside of school
Under the tutelage of Hegias,
My father's old-time friend, and his successor
In leadership among the sculptors here.
Though older, he came later to his own
Through sheer indomitableness. His art
Was conscience vivified — a little dry,
Mechanical (he deprecated life),
But faithful utterly and honest. Skill,
And not imagination, was his gift.
And skill was what I needed most to get
At that time when imagination flew,
With me, free-winged and through a boundless sky.
His teaching kept me patiently to earth,
No matter how I fluttered to his hand.
I fluttered hard, though. It was tedious
And unrepaying to devote myself,
Week-long and month-long, to minute detail
Of some uninteresting subject, set
By him, in conscience, to my lawless hand.
And I respected him as one respects
A sterling standard one can scarce attain
But takes as law of nature, not to be
In any way disdained, though hardly loved.
I hungered for my father's amplitude,
Which promised greatest things if he had lived.
I was dissatisfied and keen for fresh,

And better, subjects. Colour, too, allured
From the, I think, too unemotional
And too restricted field of Hegias.
"Be always plastic," was his constant word;
"Painting is woman, sculpture man, in art.
Let's have no hybrids or hermaphrodites."

And so he kept me under for a while,
Half docilely rebellious. What he found
Deserving most correction in myself
Was made up for by Menon, my one mate
At Hegias' ; for he imbibed with relish
What I could barely stomach. True, he had
Some gift, some personality, himself;
But it was sympathetical with Hegias' ,
And gave a clear response, uncompromised
By cross harmonics, to the master's note.
Menon, to me, personified the trite.
He made it his religion. "What's the use,"
He said, "of flying after something else
When what is here before your very eyes
Is far beyond your power to represent?
The thing I see, and old tradition, these
Are my religion, let who will prefer
To follow fancy."
And to him, in truth,
It seemed to be almost a sacrilege
To use imagination. We two worked
For years locked up together, quarreling

And arguing and sharpening our wits
Upon each other's opposition; yes,
And getting tempered by the rub and heat.
A knife will get a feeling for the wheel
It whets its edge on, and I felt for him
A pleasant friendliness, though hardly warmth —
Excepting heat to give him my opinion!
Menon felt, doubtless, much the same toward me.
We still are friends, although the hurtling years
Have hurled us into impact.
In the end
I had begun to get into the doldrums,
And Hegias himself declared that nothing more
Had he to teach me. "Send him off, abroad;
He needs a change of outlook and of life,"
He told my mother. And my heart was glad,
For I felt caged and throttled in the studio;
So much so that I had almost rebelled
Against my art, seeing it narrow down
To a mere trick of forms and formulae.
Already I was reaching, reaching out
To something different. I was not sure,
At moments when the regulations galled
Most hatefully, but that some other art —
Painting especially — might offer more;
More freedom, at the least, if not more field;
For painting still was feeling out a way,
While sculpture, in the view of Hegias,
Had reached, and stopped at, rules canonical.

My mother, thinking of Panaenus' loss
To Charmides' tradition, took alarm
Lest I too prove recalcitrant; the more,
Feeling my younger brother's lukewarmness.
Others there were among Athenians
I might have gone to but for Hegias,
Who felt reluctance at my going on,
Lest it appear to some as going up,
From him to Critius or Nesiotes.
And so it was decided I should quit
Ionic teaching for the Doric school.

Athens, it happened, had just then appointed
A mission to the southern states, to win
Support from them against the Persian force
That was accumulating over sea.
My family arranged that I should go
Along with the commissioners, when they
Embarked in the state trireme Paralos.

All these negotiations took some time;
And pros and cons were argued back and forth
Between my friends and me, you may be sure.
It was not common for Athenians
To look for light on art in other Greeks'
Benightedness. My little world took sides,
And each side used the cudgels valiantly.
Menon was the most violent of all
Against the principle he saw involved.

With all the rest, however, he came down
To see me off, when, spite of all, I sailed
For Argos. And I never shall forget
The face he wore. Up even to the last
He railed at my "desertion" : "Foolishness,
And worse, it is, this leaving Athens now,
Just when you're learning in a sort of way
To mind the bit a little. You need brakes,
Not spurs." — Something of truth in that, no doubt.

We had intolerably irked each other
At times for years; and yet when the time came
To part I somehow felt a softening
Within me I should never have believed
Was possible. I was so used by now
To feeling elbows in my side, that lack
Of them made vacancy, with no relief.

I urged his coming too, for I believed
He needed shaking up: " 'Twill do you good
To see another way of doing things;
You can return to the Athenian
If Argive does not suit. To see the world
Never hurt anybody — least of all
A sculptor born of Hegias," I laughed.
I loved to prick him thus, though all in fun.

"Athens is good enough for me," he scoffed;
"And for you too, and better, if you knew.

I hate your mixers' methods. You'll come home
Half Athens and half Argos; what is more,
Half cooked. Besides, there's in our Attic ways
Something indigenous, a native stuff
We owe it to the city to preserve.
You'll be a foreigner when you return —
Unanchored and a drifter. Fare thee well,
My Pheidias Athenian! All hail,
Barbarian! Orestes is it now?
Or Agamemnon? Argive I'll be bound.
Ah! now I have it. Sure, it is Aegisthus!"
Even in fun he could not let alone
Till he had wounded. Well he knew my fault —
Too thin a skin. He laughed to see my face.
I touched him when I mentioned Hegias —
Touched him more roughly than I realized,
It may be; for to bring up Hegias
Was not an insult, in my thought. Did he
Who followed hold his master in contempt?

There must have been some sore deep in his heart;
Not wholly selfish either, for he was,
If poor in judgment, yet no doubt sincere.
And no-one much likes being left behind,
If only from a funeral. His face,
When finally the boat put off, was drawn
With an emotion hard to analyze.
It made me wretched for an hour, and still
Does so today. I never saw its like.

It takes more than a friendly tilt to spoil,
However, what life had in store for me
That lively day. A gust of cleansing tears
Swept my sky clear, as from the tearful shore
Of home and family — and Menon — leapt
The long-oared trireme from Phalerum port.
Almost at once we found the deathly chop
Of open blue. It was my first attempt
At deep-sea cruising, but I held my own,
And kept the upper deck where the sharp wind
Spat sting-spume on me as I lurched and clung.

I glutted eyes with Athens, where it reared
From out the gracious plain its gaunt gray rock,
Crowned with its clay-walled houses, ridging up
And crusting with bright coral. Did I glimpse,
In spite of distance, where a blur of bay
Blotted our roof's warm glow with violet?
I saw it in my heart's eye, crystal-clear,
And all that I was leaving there at home —
A darling world, the only world I knew —
From which I swept as from a swung trapeze
Into new life, a limitless abyss.
Where should I drop? And was the landing soft
That waited me? Or might I come down fouled
And crippled for the rest of the long games?
And when I came again to Athens' gate

And knocked, would entrance mean unfriendly
greetings,
As Menon said with his farewell?
Not long
I cast my glances backward — nor with fear
Looked forward. Life invited. I accepted,
Let come what might; for all of life was mine,
And I would take it as it came to me,
As our black trireme took the changing seas —
Or chop or wallow, trough or curling crest.
But I determined I would keep a hold
On some substantial taffrail as I went.
I asked no rooted parapet of rock,
But only something relatively firm
To keep from jerking overboard. — Your mind,
On shipboard, gets to using similes
Well seasoned with the salt and things you hold.
And I was maudlin seasick for a while,
And dropped a very sentimental veil
Between old home and me.
Then, wilfully,
I swung to moorings. As we passed the point
To north of harbour Salamis arose,
All pearly in the offing, and I turned
From my closed Athens to the open sea —
From past to future.
Reaching round, I saw,
Glued to the starboard rail, as I to port,
A youth of my own age or thereabout

Whose bushy red head blocked out Salamis
And the whole north. His eye at once caught mine.
The fun of the whole situation struck
Us both at the same instant, and both broke
Into a howl of laughter that drowned out
The wave-wind orchestra. "We'll keep her taut
And steady, never fear!" my rail-mate yelled,
In tones as richly lurid as his hair;
"As caryatids we make one smart pair —
Gems of first water! This at least is mine."

That was our introduction — quite enough
To set us well upon the road to friendship.
He was a new experience to me.
Not Athens, surely, bred such burliness,
Such uncurbed vigour, such refreshing spirit.
He was not stylish, for his cloth was coarse
And rather spotty for the first hour out.
And yet there was a something in his air —
His speech, his glance, his carriage as a whole —
That marked him master. Who and what was he?
In Athens I should certainly have shied
At his unmannered readiness to jest
Before we got our bearings. But abroad
It seemed quite natural. So these things go:
Off with the checks, once one is off to sea.

I liked him from the instant my chaste eyes
Were raped by his high colour. Morning long

We were inseparable. Neither one
Was anxious for the other's name and state.
We were two human beings, all alone
In a wide world of waters, and were friends
On our own grounds, the tossing deck of life.
What I liked most of all about the fellow
Was freedom from convention that was not
A flaunting of it but unconsciousness
Of its existence. Frankly animal
And male — yes, almost too much so, it seemed
To sticklish Attic ways of thinking — yet
A soul of honest calibre, himself
Let come what would.
I got to like him well
And without reservations by the time
We hove to, under Corinth. His eyes shone
As he declared his purpose to come over,
Once settled down in Argos, just to see
And taste that town a little: "Where I live
They are so prudish and particular
I'll take a flight at Corinth, by and by."
He wanted all of life, and nothing short
Of life alive would satisfy his taste.

He must have seen my face fall when he dropped
A careless word that he was from Boeotia.
"And you're from Athens. Oh, I know that well.
Only Athenians are so surprised
To find a friend from elsewhere. We Boeotians,

Upon the other hand, are most surprised
To find a friend at home."
We took aboard
A lot of bleating animals, in port,
And when we started in again to rear
Rampageously on stiffening seas, the beasts
Behaved at first as if it were a joke
Too practical for the best taste. At last
A shaggy old he-goat put down his foot
On further fooling: "I shall run this boat;
Take to the cockpit, all you bleating fools,
And give me clearance," we could see him say.
And sure enough, with his great spiral horns
He took the poop, upon a tipsy chest,
And ran us, doubtless to his heart's desire,
Except that when his ground gave under him
A pained look of surprised bewilderment
Wilted his high-pricked ears. My new friend roared
To beat the bleating: "There's a churl for you.
When I grow up I'm go'n' to model him.
That bully is more human than a man."

A modeler! I had not thought of that;
We had enough to jabber of all day
Without suspecting; now it came to us
To introduce ourselves again, this time
Upon the plane of occupation. Last
Of all, we reached the level of our plans.
They too just coincided. He and I

Were both to study with Ageladas
At Argos.
For the rest of that first day
Of freedom we behaved not unlike goats
On tipsy chests at sea in squalls. My friend,
I must say, led the way, but nothing loth
I followed. And we owned and ran that ship —
At least as much as billy-goat. "What use
Are good examples if you let 'em be?
If goats be men, then we be he-goats. See?"
He sang. Nothing could quell his spirits. Clowns
Are tame cats to his monkey tricks.
In time,
When we ran through the Aeginetan straits,
The evening dipped the world in nacre. Soon
He dropped a little from his highest key
And I began to feel another phase
Of his full nature. Music from his lips
Was not what I had known. It had a tang
Of wild plums in a garden, poetry
Through Pan-pipes. Something in the darkening air,
Some circumambient kindness, softened him.
The wind had died out with the setting sun,
And the sea weltered silken emerald
Shot with slow lilac flames. The fleckless sky
Was an untroubled face of quietness.
We drew together pleasantly and near.
The evening deepened into purple night.
The raised sail blacked a vast square from the stars.

We both grew silent, to the pulsing hush
And dripping sweep of the great banks of oars.
We slept at last and kept each other warm. —

Morning at Nauplia! We had swept by
Hermione and Hydra while we slept,
And I had thought to pick their sparkles out
Like fireflies in the darkness! — Over there
Sparta would be, beyond the western hills.
Above us loomed a huge rock-fortress. North,
Across the circlet of glassed waters, lay
A land of verdure like a lake of jade
Cupped in fawn mountains. . . . Here the fathers
came,
From weary toils and travels. Here they found
Their land of promise in the long ago. . . .
I thrilled with foreignness and homesickness,
Yet a strange feeling like a getting home. —

Myron awoke (have I not told his name?)
And brushed my mood away: "Let's get ashore
And pack our beasts before the sun is up.
That sure is Argos there — the crumb of bread
Beside the salad in yon earthen crock.
We ought to get there in a single spurt.
Here's landing — whoop!" —
Past Tiryns' tiny mound
We scuttled in an hour — a handful now

Of rough-piled boulders flung in empty plain.
Far up ahead the muleteer made out,
And we tried hard to emulate his sight,
Royal Mycenae thrust a lion's paw
From out his mountain den. Then Argos lay
And smiled, inviting us to her embrace.

Argos was then the leading town in Greece;
Oh, not at all in size or present power,
But in, say, prestige. Athens, Sparta, seemed,
In Hellas' feeling, almost upstart-like,
Though even then so potent. So my thought
Pricked up for consciousness of heart-of-things.
But Argos was a leisurely old hub
That let the tire do all the hastening.
Ageladas was almost the whole town
Apparently. He was at least alive,
In bygone greatness that had still kept on
Making a show, long after breath had flown.
We found the place most deadly humdrum — I,
In contrast with my Athens' liveliness;
And Myron, with his longings for more life.

But in Ageladas and in his school
We found much more than we had ever thought
There was to learn, though high we rated him;
For we found also in the studio
Shoots from all branches of Hellenic stock;
And stimulating, quite as much as was

Ageladas' own teaching, was the wine
We drank from the brimmed cups all round about.
We were received with such distinctive rites
As best befit the novice; everyone
Crowded around us calling for a song,
A dance, a story; and, to finish up,
Inquired respecting our virginity;
All this, of course, with us as we were born.
Me they dubbed Big Boy Brownie, for the nonce,
Till better offered, when they should have found
The softest spot beneath my ticklish skin.
Myron they nicknamed Redhead — Red for short.
When he was stripped his body was a fluff
Of amber pile on snowflake satin skin
(Not too much sun, I guessed, where he came from),
Kindling, in crest and pit, to flares of flame.
I thought of one at home, whose colours were
His feminine, and felt my whole heart warm
With comfort and companionship for him.

Having met all the tests they cared to make,
We were presented for the master's own.
As ceremonies go, I know of none
More awe-inspiring. Though Ageladas
Was a small man — the smallest I have known
Among the many great small men — he had
A dignity that would become a king.
No eye like his to rip one's stuffing out
And prove it sawdust. Taller as I stood

By head and shoulder, I was like a child,
So diffident before his majesty.
Unlike most kings, he waited for a word
From one who dared address him. Hearing none,
He made a sign of lofty graciousness,
Putting me well in place, and passed beyond. —
So I was in. The narrow gate swung to
Behind, and all life previous was done.
Forget it. I had reached the inmost place
Of privilege. I was enrolled. The seal
Of worthiness was shining on my brow.
If Menon only could have seen me then! —

Ageladas' great gift, authority,
Imprinted both his features and his works.
He had a beak that eagled the whole man,
An eye that stooped from eyrie to the prey,
A chin that beat all opposition down.
His visits to the studio were few,
Irregular; he was a busy man
And had commissions from the ends of Greece —
Perhaps too many. But his word was law,
Though he be absent from the studio.
The hour of his anticipated coming
Was waited breathlessly. What you had done,
By way of building masterpieces, crashed
To cheap bazaar-stuff in the anxious hour
That heralded his coming. If he passed
In silence your poor thing you breathed a sigh

Of vast relief and picked your pieces up.
If by the rarest chance he deigned: "Not bad,"
You mounted to the highest peak of fame.
He generally talked but with his thumb,
A searching instrument of torture — ah,
But stimulating. You turned inside out
And upside down, till you began to glimpse,
Yourself, what he would have you see, if not
Precisely what he saw himself. He saw,
You may be certain, all there was to see;
But what he seized on always was the gift
There might be in each man, to bring it out.
He had a genius for producing men
Not after his, but after their, own image.

His other sculpture — but I want to say,
Before I leave his teaching, how surprised
I was, how opposite to Hegias'
His ways were. I expected him to be
Like him, but more so. Take the half-disdain
Of Hegias for painting; my new master
Laid emphasis upon it from the start.
"Nothing like painting, for your planes and tones"
Was the first thing Ageladas had said,
Seeing me modeling like Hegias.
For my part I could ask for nothing better.

He kept his private workshop far away
Across the city, to escape the sounds

Of pandemonium in our studio,
Nor skimp its license. Once a year or so
We got a formal bidding to his house,
To bend the knee to his high mightiness,
Or play the acolyte for benefit
Of some great stranger who had come to lay
A wreath of laurel at his shrine, in shape
Of new commissions. These increased so much
As time went on and his fame spread abroad
That he was smothered by their frequency,
And though much flattered, helpless for the load.
But nothing could induce him to refuse;
So with the eldest of us he devised
A method of redemption. Each of us
Got to be farmer-out of provinces
In his colonial empire. I myself
(Forgive, gods!) perpetrated one dark deed
For the Pellenians — a work that went
As of my authorship, by privilege
Ageladas accorded me. He drawled:
"It is not quite my manner, but will do,
If you will kindly certify it's yours."
I caught the human twinkle in his eye
For the first time. He had admitted me
Behind his last defences. We were friends. —

I found myself, as artist, under him;
And what is more, I learned to play the game.
But scarcely less important was the craft

Of sculpture, as distinguished from the art,
That Argos taught me — all the processes
Of technical manipulation that,
But once acquired, freed fancy's eager wings,
Which else were earthbound. Attic sculptors worked
Mostly in marble; but Ageladas
Delighted in the metals, and his skill
As founder of fine bronze was unapproached.
From him I learned the sacred secret methods
Of pointing up and casting, and the ways
Of wedding ivory with gold and gems
To give a structure sound and permanent.
Even the skeleton of cedar wood
To which the precious fragments were let in,
I learned to fabricate and brace, myself.
All earthy elements of airy art
I found Ageladas the master of,
And freest-handed of imparters too;
If I had wings he fledged them with his skill. —

Myron and I had now attained the top
Of every ladder in the studio.
The last year that we worked there a new boy,
Younger than we were when we entered, came
From Sikyon — a genius and a poet.
His name was Polycleitus. He was one
Of those great natures who by birth are gods.
A fine flame lighted him all up, a lamp
Of ravishing, effulgent clarity.

He was already cleverer than we,
And with his magic fingers brought to life
By a mere touch. I held my breath and trembled
Lest in that breezy atmosphere of ours
His flame be snuffed. But no, he burned straight on
Through every blast from all the windy mouths.
Even the damping of authority
But steadied him. "You can't put out good oil,"
Myron would say, "by setting in a draught.
Why, that's what oil most needs to make it flare."

We grew to be warm friends, this brilliant youngster,
Myron, and I; in fact between ourselves
We made so close a triple amity
It came to be called Tripod, as a jest,
Though not at all a jest in our esteem.
An older man in such a scheme as ours
(The fast-loose polity of studios)
Can be of service to a new arrival
In ways that are not obvious (if that,
It kills their kindness), and we fathered him
Behind a half-transparent screen of banter.

If there was one thing that could more endear
Myron to me, it was the scrupulous
But unobtrusive nonchalance with which
He eased the lot of Polycleitus. They,
In speech, build, colour, purpose, method, mind,

Were opposites — the poles of artistry
And human stuff. And doubtless this explains,
In part, their mutual attractiveness;
It was instinctive, surely. But there was,
Beside this, a good judgment, on the part
Of each, that, given their unselfishness,
Did but confirm the feeling of delight
That worked between the two, as men and artists.

That Polycleitus was fastidious
About his person and punctilious
In breeding brought their oppositeness out;
For Myron had a certain carelessness
Of person and of manners, though, of course,
Cleanly and courteous in his off-hand way;
While Polycleitus' fibre was so fine
It held him in as well as led him on.
To him, what was not right was not "the thing";
"The thing" was all there was, and nothing else
Existed, to his thinking. Oh, perhaps
That seems another way of saying prig.
No. That was not his nature. It is one thing
To see a sin and turn from it, to land
In virtue; and it is another thing
To cleave to virtue, sin not even seen.
And that was Polycleitus, in his art
And all relations.
Virtue? Even there,
Although I used it but in figure, he

Stood frankly out from a salacious crowd,
A marked exception to the single test
They seemed to set, of sculptorhood —
That he who entered be no more a maid;
For virgin he remained, there is no doubt,
Mid all the pits of school experience.
One understands it, with his delicate,
Sure self-withholding for the perfect thing.
But that he held his own with all the minds
He lived among calls for some wonderment.
It adds a witness to his manliness
That they forbore to tease him: "Let him be,
He's man enough. His turn will come in time.
Artists like him do always as they please."
Such was the fiat of the studio.
For the security of innocence
Foulness avoids, as sweetness seeks, its skin,
And he swam clean in the strong, muddy stream.

Apart from love, and even that was scarce
In staid old Argos, there was little fun
For a young fellow in his leisure time
Except the baths and the gymnasium.
My own tastes took me often there, and Myron,
Outside his fun and sculpture, lived for nothing
But exercise and water. From our work,
Which even we its devotees could scamp
For livelier pleasures, we lost little time
To naked jollity.

I had been used
At home to something much like prudishness —
Although not quite that — in the strict restraint
That hedged me round (customs have altered since);
And while of course I often used the nude
In modeling, yet it was always throned
Apart and inaccessible. Abroad
Old Attic manners were most circumspect;
Even at school, in the gymnasium,
The guardians and teachers had an eye,
An eagle eye, for careful covering.
But following the Doric cult, down there
I found life lived more naturally, stripped
And quite unconscious of its nakedness,
In all outdoor athletic exercise.
I loved the custom, even from the time
When my first trial of the manner shocked
My bashfulness a trifle; and I came,
After a little, to regard the new
As infinitely better than the old
Tradition. It meant everything to me
As sculptor, to have always full in view
The living forms I worked with.
Truth to tell,
I never entered the gymnasium
But I felt honourably introduced
Into a cleanlier society,
With sense of uplift and of pure delight
Now face to face with life and all it meant

Of human marvel. Many a poor scrub
Who came to work disreputably mean
Went out to play, with garments off, a king.
It cleaned up half my haziness of thought,
And so of vision, to go naked too
Myself, and air my soul by openness
Of the soul's temple. I am sure my love
For Myron and for Polycleitus rose
To highest levels of full fellowship
In that free intercourse of man and man,
Free from all artificiality.

I am a sculptor, and that may be why.
How can I think of Myron, seeing only
His freckled features and his head afire?
I see his body too, not perfect quite,
But built for business. Wrestling was his game,
And his broad shoulders showed it, and the brawn
Of his full breastworks. Loaded just a bit
Atop, diminished down along the loins,
Thinned out to a fine ankle and a foot
As dainty as a dancer's — just the shrine
To hold a Myron's genius, which spoke out,
Consistent with its housing: "Life alive!"

I said that Polycleitus and our friend
Were opposites. I may have had in mind
What memory retains of their two figures,
Rather than genius (though the two are one

In a large sense; at least consistency
Inheres within the double singleness);
For Polycleitus' was the perfect form,
So fine in grain, so supple, so abloom,
It almost seemed a budding girl had been
Intended in his making, though so male.
He was a swimmer, and the limber frame,
Just balancing for either work or play,
Was clothed harmoniously with (to name it)
Firmness, which was not muscle, yet performed
In secret, underneath the flowing skin,
All offices of muscle. He was strong
In an all-round and unsuspected way
When you took hold of him. He was not slight,
He was not heavy — just the happy mean.
His head was poised with a grave symmetry
That was repose itself. His skin was smooth
And flawless velvet, deeply olive toned,
Running from russet, grayed with heliotrope,
Through rich warm ochre to the jetty mosses.

The joy of art is its diversity.
Already he and Myron were at grips
With their specific life-work — one of them
With pure proportion — one with action pure.
And both were born to work those problems out
Exemplifying in themselves their tasks.

My bent was different. And it is hard
To state precisely what my problem was —

Beyond me always, even to this hour.
Something, and much — oh, much! — from both my
friends,
I caught, I gathered, and I treasured up.
I am their debtor in a thousand ways.
But what I sought for, if three words will do,
Was: God in man. Or rather, it may be
(A perilous adventure!): man in God.

PHEIDIAS

III

CORINTH

PHEIDIAS

III

CORINTH

You will recall that when I first met Myron
He had great plans for Corinth. To the last
Of our long Argive studies he postponed,
And still postponed, the longed-for love-adventure.
An empty pocket was the difficulty;
Moreover, action always was, with him,
A thing of present need; a future plan
Was much like a mirage. So his todays
Took more than their due toll of his tomorrows.
"The instant's urgent! Now's the time; strike hard! " —
That was his watchword. And in Argos town
He struck both hard and long at the old game.
Corinth might wait; it could not be so much
Richer than Argos, after all, as Argos
Richer than Eleutherae. But one day
The plan, the play, the pocket, all combined.
"Come on, let's dig ourselves out of this grave! "
Myron had muttered; and we took his cue.
The Isthmian games presented an excuse
For celebration.

We went light, afoot
Of course. "The Tripod walks abroad," they said;
And sacrificed, to speed us on our way.
The slaves came after with pack animals. —

There was a feeling in my inmost heart
That this first time we traveled thus alone
Together, all the world beside left out,
Would be the last time too. Hellas was wrought
And anxious, underneath the gathered cloud
That darkened the horizon to the east.
The Persians were already on the march.
Should Corinth celebrate these very games,
In Hellas' strait? None knew how long postponed
Might be the sure arbitrament of arms.
I thought of Marathon — of the great surf
That crashed, and then withdrew, to gather up
Inevitable, recrudescent strength,
To sweep all Hellas and obliterate
Our tribal landmarks.
"Don't you mind the Medes,"
Myron objected to my anxiousness.
"They got it once just where they needed it.
We'll give 'em once again just what they need.
Greece has decided that the games go on.
Borrow no trouble."
So we put it by.
And even one who had fought Marathon
With his own childish eyes could half forget. —

The Isthmian games are little different
From your Olympic. You perhaps prefer
No mention of their rivalry. In truth,
Pantarkes, I have no desire to play
The guide. All that I wish, since you have asked it,
Is to reveal my life development;
And many interesting facts are nil
As clues to that elusive labyrinth. —

When we arrived in Corinth we perceived
That it was Myron's party. Where he went
We might not always follow, to be sure;
But always we awaited his return
With equal welcome for the prodigal
And his adventures. " 'Opportunity'
Corinth should have been called," he testified;
And we, who had less taste than Myron had
For seizing it, contented us with tales
That elsewhere surely would have been ruled out.

As soon as we were settled, my first thought
Was to discover the Athenians;
I soon identified them in the square
Allotted by tradition — just, in size,
The sail they hoisted. In the delegation
Were three familiar faces: Pericles,
Who had come on as representative
Of the young boys in the pentathlon team;
Magnes the poet, who was looking out

For matter for a coming comedy;
And Sophocles, who was about to try
For the dried celery in singing. These
Most gladly joined us, doubling thus our trio.
Instead of Tripod it was now Sextet.
(Six is the perfect club — three teams of twos,
And for variety two teams of threes.)
Each found a mate who fitted to a tee,
But pairs were often changed and interchanged.
You can imagine how rejoiced I was
To greet old friends once more; for I had been
Lonely at Argos; no Athenian
In all that time had visited the town,
That I knew of. I had begun to lose
My faith in the exclusive love I had
For Athens, in an outlook broader, much,
But looser, more especially since friends
Who were as dear as mine, had come so far
To meet in Argos, where not one belonged.
And I have never lost that freedom yet.
But I was glad to have old bonds knit up
Without unraveling the newer ones.

I felt some pride too in the friends who were
My own great contribution to the club
We kindred spirits formed, from the first word.
I did not know whether to plume me more
On introducing Greece to Athens, or
Athens to Greece; for either side in turn

Caressed me for the other. Pericles
Delighted me by taking Myron in.
I might have feared the two would clash, a bit,
With Pericles' fine ways and Myron's rough.
But Pericles already had begun
To leave his lofty pose, for popular.
The rest were certain to amalgamate.

I might say here that Sophocles withdrew
And gave up singing, when he found Sextet
So entertaining. "I can sing again,"
He said; "I might not have you five again."
Social was Sophocles. Perhaps he thought
His chance was slight too. He could calculate
Values with nicety. But of them all,
The social values outweighed all the rest.
So only Pericles had his affairs —
Officially, at least, not counting Myron's.

Those of us who had time lost no event
Of all the galaxy of scintillance —
Athletics, races, music, poetry.
I loved them all; and this was my first chance
To get my fill; so I drank deep and long,
Exalted by the glamour of the games.

Nevertheless, I could not keep my eyes
On special features of the celebration;
It was the pageant as a motived whole

That penetrated me, fresh as it was
To my experience. The living crowd —
All Hellas congregated with one mind,
Centred, coordinated — had for me
An infinite appeal. I felt then, first,
Significance in race. Humanity
Meant more to me than I had ever dreamed,
Thus massed and marshaled. And a sense of life
Intrinsically resident in man
Surged up in me, an overflowing spring.
I felt enlarged in stature, Hellenized
And humanized, as one experience.
Whether, as part of the great multitude,
A nothing on the bosom of that sea,
I moved with it on waves of feeling — or,
Between the swift events, as one of our
Close band, so singled from the multitude,
And yet so broadly representative —
I felt ennobled, strengthened, sweetened, all
With double sense of pride and humbleness:
So slight a part of the vast entity
Mankind, so central to its meaning, Man.

From that time I have loved to be in crowds,
And have drawn from them spurs and sympathies
That stimulated and confirmed my art.
The crowd in small — that was our chosen group
Of kindred souls, so varied, so at one.
They gave me grasp, as nothing else could do,

Of my own manhood, of humanity,
And of the bonds that hold the two together —
Both of them necessary elements
In the taut chain that links our universe
With that of the immortal gods, and makes
Of all a whole. —
We were not serious
Quite all the time, though, you may well suppose.
Magnes fed-in a comic view of life
That was cathartic. He had little changed
Since the old days at Athens. As a boy
He seemed a scoffer, to my earnest mind.
I told you how he traveled, while at school,
Inside or outside, rarely on, our line;
None of us then had quite accepted him,
For his satiric tongue. But I had taken,
Under old Myron's hand, a good stiff course;
And in the scoffer I now recognized
The cure of laughter for the sours of life.

Magnes aimed straight at Myron; took him off,
To admiration; held him up to laughs
That came the loudest from the butt himself.
Both he and Myron did their level best
To keep the puppets dancing. While they piped
We others had to quickstep to keep up.

Our nicknames side-glossed all our varied rôles,
And were our prime correctives. Pericles —

Who was particular, to say the least,
In all relations, a monogamist
In his essential nature, if not quite
As much so in his life — laughed out one day:
"Myron, my boy, you'd make a great stud-horse."
Magnes pinned on the name for good and all,
And Myron from that hour was known as "Stud."
But he got back with: "Magpie, that's the bird
That picks up bright things bigger people drop."
And "Magpie" Magnes was from that time on.
The best of all was, that name etched the man.
Whenever we met ladies in the street
Magnes would whinny in ventriloquy.
Myron, much flattered, then would strut and caw:
"Let little magpies try no big horse-play."
With Pericles the Magpie got on well,
And in a way he was responsible
For Pericles' career. He was "Mў Lord"
Always to Magnes, with a shortened y.
I mentioned (did I not?) the change in pose
Of Pericles; that nickname turned the trick.
Friend Sophocles had lighted up a flame
For Polycleitus; "Softie" nailed the thing.
And Polycleitus, who returned the warmth,
Suffered for boyish femininity
Under "Miss Poly Softie Polishoff,"
Soon shortened, or say softened, down to "Miss."
The Magpie picked my name from Menon's hoard
(The two, no doubt, compared their notes at home):

"The Follower of Fancy," clipped to "Fan" ;
He struck an attitude of ecstasy
That made me humble-pie-man then and there.
"My Lord, Stud, Softie, Magpie, Miss, and Fan —
We'll play our parts as only such folks can"
Was Magnes' doggerel. —
The games were called.
We hurried to our places down the long
Half avenue of pines, half gleaming row
Of ancient sculptures, peopling all the dusk
With gaiety. — The games were on again. —

Single as seemed the interest, there seeped,
Through all the gathering, a subtle stream
Of chill and anguish. If the merest trifle
Alarming happened — a gray shred of cloud
Adrift across the sun, a screaming bird
In flight from unseen enemies, a lull
In the packed program unexplained — the crowd
Was nervous as a restive horse, excited
By what was in all minds, but covered up
And put away by general consent.
Not once, but many times, in those few days,
I felt the shiver, underneath the heat,
As if a seething bubbled up from ice.

And Pericles confessed a like foreboding;
He talked to me of what there was in store
Most certainly for Hellas. What he said

Worked in me. He and Sophocles, it seemed,
Had, for a year, been in the garrison
Down at Phalerum. Athens needed all
The men whom she could muster, for the time,
Not long to wait — a year or two, not more,
Most likely less — when the Great King should come
A-knocking at her gates, a million strong. —

I did not say much. But the fateful words
That Pericles had breathed so quietly
Wrought my calm bosom to a troubled sea.
Athens again must pit herself against
The marshaled Orient — this time, perhaps,
Breast all alone the overwhelming odds.
It did not take me long to make my mind.
Instead of back to Argos I would go
With Pericles to Athens and enlist.

I gave him my decision. Deeply moved,
He pressed my hand in silence; but we knew
We were a single mind, and we were friends —
Eternally — and Greeks.
When I had found
A way to tell the others, they were silent.
For Polycleitus that was nothing strange —
He had a face too speaking to require
Any but simplest words, and those but few.
But Myron was a puzzle. Not a jest
Had he, for this his greatest chance to gibe

His flighty-minded Pheidias, whom he
Had — oh, so often — caught and pinioned down
To finishing, without a further change.
He turned to something else, as if he had
Discounted news that was already old.
But all that afternoon he stayed with us,
In spite of invitations to enjoy
The friends of Aphrodite. He it was
That made the proposition we should all
Forget the games, for one night, and go off
To spend the darkness wandering together.
For by the dawn we should have gone our ways.—

It was the wane of twilight when we rose
From supping in the Agora. A light
Reflected from the water seemed to flow
Pale sea-blue to the house tops, shattering there
In iridescent gildings from the sun
But lately sunken. Through the skyey gloom
The market place, in festival array
Of lamps and torches, shot out meteors
And starry splendours, like a Milky Way
Moltenly sparkling.
Pleasure called to us,
But friendship summoned to the mountain top.
We were to climb the tortuous, long way
Up to High Corinth, where the lighted shrine
Of Aphrodite signaled down the dusk.

The vast rock, islanding from out the sea
Of sunless levels, held a late, warm bloom
From the suffusion of the western sky
When we emerged from the sparse scattering
Of the last houses up the steep, and stepped
Into the fragrant freshness of the height.
The town lay out below us, spangled over
With festal brilliance stretching to two seas
Of lapis lazuli.
We had not talked
So much as usual until we came
Beyond the city. Then our tongues were loosed.
We changed from friend to friend, as the hours flew,
Or gathered all together, close and warm.
We drew apart, while thoughts went their own ways.
We lingered two and two in the dear dark.
But when we talked, it was but off! away!
Or else the opposite, of deeper things —
Of Greece and of her fateful hour at hand;
Of life, of art, of beauty; of the fate
That captained each in his own character;
All unafraid to give our hearts away,
Or to pre-empt an ear that was not ours.
We were begotten, born, and lived a life,
We lived a life and laid our burdens down,
Each for the others, each for each in turn.
Sure of our own as of each other's ground,
Touching, in openness and freedom, things

That mostly men avoid, or hide away
In their own secret places, fearful lest
The glare of others' knowledge may foreclose
Some mortgage on their opportunities,
We talked of what most interests young men —
Of love, and of its joys and mysteries.
And led reciprocally thus we learned
The clue each to each other's character;
For it is love, and love alone, that weaves
The secret pattern of all human lives.

Myron found hardest to throw off the veil —
The one of us whose life seemed openest,
Most on the surface. He, of the Sextet,
Evoked the most admiring sympathy;
All hearts clave close to his frank virileness;
For incarnated in his force we saw
The force that in ourselves we held to be
The central spring and spirit of our being.
I knew, as others did not, how life's flood
Had borne him out upon its mighty breast;
For I had been with him in intimate
And frankest freedom, through the surging years
When the tide comes from its unsounded deeps
To take its own. I knew, as no one else,
How those he claimed returned to claim their lord
Or lay their love unasked-for at his feet.
For it was in his character that he —
The lavishest, most tireless giver-out —

In giving, took again, for good and all;
The warmth he made remained to warm the world.
In that clean air of utter confidence
He surely should have felt no vague restraint;
And yet he found it difficult to drop
The last translucent films from off his soul
Before us others — as if modesty,
Entrenched and undergrounded in himself,
Must still maintain the structure, though beyond
The no-man's land all works had been thrown down.

I heard him say, as we moved slowly on —
Not Myron as I knew him, but as they,
The friends who were just less his friends than I — :
"I am of living stuff and so are they.
Why should I search for something that's not there?
Or if it is, has nought to do with love —
With love in that great other way we know:
The love of friends, the feeling we all have
For one another."
On the flowing air
There floated up the voice of Pericles,
Deep burthened, but as buoyant as a boat
Whose freest ranging yet obeys the helm:
"I hold the two are on an equal plane.
The love of woman and the love of friends
Are the twin phases of a single star
That beacons us across an unknown sea."

But Sophocles, whose arm was linked in arm
With Polycleitus on the upward path,
Chanted with sweetness all Aeolian:
"The love of friends is nobler and more pure;
There are no dregs of earth in that deep cup.
The love of woman's a brief bite and sup,
But love of friends will unto death endure."

Magnes, till then a silent listener,
In his worst manner now put in his oar —
As usual, a thrust to break the stroke — :
"Which will you have — an apple or a poem?
And which is which, of the two kinds of love?
I rather think a mixture'd suit my taste —
Either a poem pomological
Or else a pome that's poematical."

And Polycleitus, from his wing piped up:
"I don't see why a girl can't be a friend.
I never want to love one if she can't."

Myron moved close to Polycleitus' side:
"Good talk, my boy. You're right, there, once for all.
If she feels not some friendship it's a fraud. —
And yet, how rare the chance two kindred souls
Have, to be found in bodies kindred too;
And rarer still their chance to find each other.
I've heard it said there is a jealous god

Who takes good care that they be housed apart;
Else would our human hovels be the shrine
Where gods, dethroned, would worship men, made
gods."

There was a pause. But somehow, at his words,
There came into my mind the form of one
Whom I had known, to love's last uttermost,
And who to me summed up all essences
Of womanhood, as he of manhood — one
Who, in a way I strangely could not fix
Nor analyze, seemed his own counterpart
And other self — whose pure fire-colours even
Were kin to his, refined and feminized.
We always think our own way is the best
And only way of truly living love.
I felt my heart melt down and pour itself
In a mad cataract to my dear friend:
"If only I could make my own way his
So that he too might know the joy of love!"
But I said nothing. "Oh, how blind we are,
Who cannot see aught out of our own range,"
I thought, "not even when we estimate
As glorious the thing beyond, unseen!"

Again, in the deep gloom below the crag
That bore upon its brow the lighted shrine,
His voice was wafted to me, far away,
Melodious as a rhythmic interlude:

"Love is reciprocal and equipoised.
I ask no more than I can give to them."
How different the implication seemed
Of these and of those other words of his.
What he could give to them — a Myron's love!

And yet again, he stood with head up-thrown
With an unwonted bearing, as of pride
Or glorifying, or as if his eyes
Were opened to a vision far and fair:
"We have within our selves so many! 'I'
So faces outwards from a thousand fronts —
To each there is a neighbour opposite. —
But there might be a one who stayed at home,
Fixed and unalterable, while the guests
In all the other houses moved, or changed."

"And some," sighed Magnes, "might the curtains
draw."

The night had nestled down on noiseless wings.
We turned, at the far western upward trend
Where the road swerved amid the close bee-brush,
Pungently blossoming, and climbed abruptly
Into High Corinth gateway. Lights were lit
And flaring, as we passed and climbed again
Into an echoing courtyard of the dark.

Walls of the stronghold, black and blind, held us

Within a deep-cupped hollow of the hill.
But far above, and lonely to the east,
Hung like a lamp against the tapestry,
The glowing temple shone and called us up. —
"She is a temple where a soul is shrined
Apart from ours forever, and above,"
The far-lamped gloom was trembling-resonant
With Myron's voice. "We worship at her feet."

And Magnes held his peace, content at last. —

Upward, and on, still on, we footed it
Until we seemed besprinkled with the stars.
Then, for the first time, Myron spoke to me
About our parting at the morrow's dawn:
"I wish I might go with you, Pheidias."
His words were hardly voiced above his breath.
"Think me not less a Greek. There is a girl
At Argos. I won't leave her there alone,
Or not for very long — not yet a while.
There is a future for us two together —
You know —"
And he was silent, suddenly.
"And so — you see —"
And so I saw at last. —

When we had drunken from Peirene spring,
High on the shoulder of the peak itself —
A quenchless miracle as from the sky —

I sat with Polycleitus, while the rest
Moved onward for the last hard breathless rise.
He was the youngest of us, and his hour
Had not yet sounded, for his virgin soul
Looked forward and not backward to the tide
That takes us all at last. And to the sound
Of pure Peirene's whisper to the night
He opened his young heart and sang his song:

"It is so sweet to hear you friends rehearse
Your dearest dramas, endlessly diverse,
While I have still to taste the wondrous wine,
Have still to guess how sweet and how divine.
I can surmise its joy from the wild gleams
That half torment and half delight my dreams,
But with perfections always that allure
And always that escape. No form so pure
In waking moments that its light could play
Rival to midnight visions of the day.
She fades from me and I awake from fire
To emptiness and ashes of desire."

I gave him counsel such as sages may
Who boast so few though so abundant years;
But we sail chartless on the sea of love,
And each of us must venture out alone
And in the dark, to bournes we know not of.
Yet we two came more close than ever yet
Because he had revealed me his desire.

His heart lay bare and pure there in my hand
To soothe with fellow feeling. —
We arose
And arm in arm we mounted to the shrine,
And with the others sacrificed to Love;
Swearing, and sealing, our fidelity
Eternal to the friendship that had flamed
At Aphrodite's hearthstone into fire
To keep us all our lives from wintering. —

Beside the temple, in a nook withdrawn
And deep in shadow from the colonnade,
There was a curved exedra, where we sat
In loving fellowship till night had waned;
In fellowship, but silence, for we felt
Purged and uplifted by the sacrament,
And words were needless for fraternity.

And as the hours drew on I came to see
As in a vision the eternal things —
Life, love, and beauty, and the soul of Greece. —

I felt a fateful meaning in the thought
That on that lofty pinnacle, which towers
At just the centre of all Hellene lands —
The crossing of all ways by land and sea —
Is Aphrodite's temple. Opposite,
Across the gulf of Corinth to the north,
Parnassus lifted a dim wintriness

Into the night, and sheltered in his bosom
Apollo's Delphic oracle; to east
Of the Saronic waters Athens lay,
The birthplace of Athena; westerly,
Over the gleam of the long summit snows
Walling Arcadia, Olympic Zeus
Guarded his temple: distant all alike
And fanning out as if they were but rays
From a vast mystic circle, struck from Love. —

The night was very dark — only the stars
Above, and, far below, the twinkling town
That seemed diminished heaven, in reverse.
But now the moon rose over Attica
And paved a path across the crystal sea.

And by the lifted lamp of Artemis
I saw all love as one, and pure as she.
I saw that all the love that had been born
Within my childish heart in the old home
When my beloved came from stranger lands,
Sent by the fates to lead me, and that bloomed
Within me to the very flower of life
When she came to me in my little room
And we were made one flesh, for life and death;
The love I bore my mother, at her breast,
And through the after, dear, estranging years;
My love for my dead father, changed and wrought
Into my worship of his memory;

My love for these close friends, and most of all
For Myron; and the love I gave to Greece,
To man, and to the unknown gods above:
All those were one, inseparably one.
And love was but another name for life,
The sublimation of its essences
In fire that kindled out of earthly dross.
From life to love, from love to beauty, these
Were the appointed steps along the path
That led from time into eternity.

Love was the centre of the basic line
From which rayed beauty in the highest place.
On either side were wisdom's seat, and power's,
Whence wisdom sprang in full maturity —
Daughter, co-warden of the life of love,
Crowning in beauty. Wisdom, beauty, power,
The polar outposts whose circumference
Centred in love. And then, in spiral form,
Love, wisdom, beauty, reaching out to power;
Reversely — power, beauty, wisdom, wound
And spiraled to the very heart of love.
These things were deep symbolic mysteries.
Beyond them were infinities the gods
Reserved in their omniscient consciousness.

The moon walked stately up the steep of night,
And silvered-over all the sapphire world
With shining chastity.

My heart was wrought
To passionate and overwhelming love
For the close-gathered friends who sat with me
And in the splendour of the vernal night
Shared earth, and sky, and the immortal gods.
There are some moments in our lives that stay
As living presences. I keep that night
Within me where are shrined my gathered-up
Ex-votos. For we were commingled souls.
I do not know if I have shown you it.
It has a meaning, and you cannot know
My soul down to its deepest, otherwise.

PHEIDIAS

IV

SALAMIS

PHEIDIAS

IV

SALAMIS

The day of my arrival with my friends
Was one of those incomparable joys
The secret of which only Athens knows —
The sky, a flawless friendliness of blue;
The world, a fragrant nosegay; and the air,
Distilled elixir of the breath of youth.

Our road up from the harbour led beneath
The dappled lawlessness of sycamores,
Along the banks of the Kephisus, combed,
In those last reaches, into rippling strands
Almost too fine to have the name of streams,
Which watered gardens bosomed in far hills.
Orchards of fig and olive flushed the plain,
Brightened with blossoming pomegranate groves,
Dusked with sharp cypress and with plumaged pine.
Far as the eye could see, the ruddy earth,
Plow-ridged and crumbled, was deep velveted
With tufty coverlets of succulence,
Plaided with healing plants and coronals,
The flame of poppies, smoke of lavender,

And wantoned with loose films of asphodel:
The paradise of the Hesperides,
With all its orderly luxuriance.
And when, through the interstices of boughs,
I glimpsed, beyond, the calm Acropolis
Like a great altar built against the sky,
I was profoundly, intimately, moved —
So large, so rich, so noble, and so fair.
This I had left, all this, and love as well!

As we drew near the gateway of the town
We passed the Kerameicus, where the tombs
Of countless generations decked the way,
Each with a piece of sculpture, or an urn,
That made the paths of mourning paths of joy.
I had forgotten, quite, how different
My Athens was from all the rest of Greece.
Why had I fretted so to get away?
These road-side sculptures — could Ageladas
And all his school begin to rival them?

We turned back for a moment at the wall
To bid good-bye to Sophocles, who kept
Straight on, to his Colonus' nightingales.
My eye fell on the fronting mountain pass
Out to Eleusis by the Sacred Way;
And Aeschylus the Eleusinian
Came to my mind. How fortunate I was
To have him for a friend — and Sophocles!

I had been parched-athirst for poetry,
All those long years at Argos. Now, at last,
Once more in Athens, I might taste again
That living spring.
Then, passing through the gate,
We made our way up to the market place
Through shadowed porches, veiled translucently
With saffron, crocus, amaranth, and rose,
And thronging with all Athens like a hive.
I was so used by now to Argive ways
Of somnolently waiting for a trade,
That these brisk carriers of merchant war
Into our camp rudely awakened me.
The place was lively as a festival.
Indeed it quite surpassed the Corinth games
Though it was merely market day. The town
Had made of it a social rendezvous.
If trade was but as brisk as talk-exchange
The wares of half the world were bought and sold
Under our eyes.
What I most marveled at
Was the extraordinary feel of life —
The range of type, the range of interest,
And then their concentration here and now
Into a circumscribed intensity.
Athens today was this packed market place;
Tomorrow it would be the theatre,
A solemn sacrifice before some shrine,
An orator's harangue upon the Pnyx,

A trial at the Areopagus.
Whatever Athens did, she did with will
And unity.
Before I had half crossed
The crowded square from circling portico
To central fountain, most of my old friends
Had greeted me and made me feel at home
By cordiality that was as high
As were the wanderer a prodigal.
But all their gaiety was not for me;
It was the commonplace of market day,
Characteristic of Athenians
As gravity of Argives. And I loved
All things Athenian with greater love
For having lived without them. —
Always there
Against the south stood up above the town
The rock of the Acropolis. From here
In the shrill market it loomed sombrely
Submerged in shade, except its chiseled edge
That caught the zenith on its jaggy facets.
And one dark plume of bay, against the sun,
Silver-fringed, shivered.
From the market place
The long Panathenaic Way took off,
And mounted the steep hill to home — and her.
I hailed a runner in the colonnade
And sent him on ahead to herald me.
Then my long climb began, against the stream

Of marketwards high-townsfolk. Pericles
Had left us; Magnes too now said good-bye;
And there was none to hinder my home thoughts
Or dull the edge of feeling.
On the way
There hardly was a house whose human face
I had not known of old, they were so like
Their own inhabitants, to my child eyes.
This was my street, as it was Athens' own
Most vital artery of circulation.
These faces that I met — they had not changed
From those I used to sit and wonder at
From my old vantage point behind the Hermes,
Attaching each to some imagined tale.
The stream forever was the selfsame stream,
However different its waters were.
Today it flowed with its old wilfulness.
Its rapids and its eddies I knew well,
And where its feeders emptied, it still swerved
Just as it used.
The place beside the spring,
With its nine green and gaping lion-mouths,
Was crowded with the water-carriers.
The shrines along the way — of Heracles,
Of Dionysus, of the Mysteries —
Were fragrant with the smoke of piety.
Above, and westward, was the range of rock
That used to wall my sunsets and the sea —
The Hill of Nymphs, the Pnyx, the Muses' Crown;

Then, opposite, the Areopagus;
In front, far off, the hyacinthine haze
Of Mount Hymettus. How their very names
Evoked old visions! Up this foot-worn way
Processions of the goddess used to pass —
Had always passed — would always pass — to climb
Into her precinct in the citadel.
No step but it was sacredly her own,
No stone but it was holy.
From each twist
And turning of the path I caught a glimpse
Of my old bay tree, hovering — the house
Against the rock — the stepped-up town — the crest —
And over all, the all-ennobling blue.
This was my Athens. I had come back home.
Argos — already faded history;
Corinth — already substanceless mirage;
But Athens was a live reality.
I recognized my home as part of me,
Myself as part of its superlative
Expression, so borne in upon my heart
Again was that old half-forgotten feeling
Of Fate's and Pheidias' commingled clues
To the Daedalian labyrinth of Athens.
In some great sense, beyond me to define,
I was my Athens, and my fate was hers.

How graciously she sat her lofty throne! —
The shadow of the rock had pivoted

From west to north; the dial of the day
Shortened its finger — I must hasten on
To greet the now expectant family.
Around the seaward frontal of the cliff
Steep rays of noon burnished the fluttered blur
Of the old door-post bay tree. Just a glint
Of roof flashed like a jewel from the shade.
And was the hearth of love alight for me?

Then, as I shouldered through the flowing crowd
To turn sharp up the short-cut stepped way, home —
Menon! — We stood for a few seconds, speechless. —
My memory retained his boyish face,
And somewhat as it was that final day
When he had said good-bye. But now I saw,
Not doubting it was Menon all the time,
Another being. He perhaps saw me
No less transformed. It was some other life,
Long, long ago, in which I once had known him.
I had not thought him handsome, as a boy;
But handsome he had grown, as he matured,
With oriental suavity of line
And of proportion, and of colour too.
His people came, they say, from Salamis
In Cyprus, and a drop of Tyrian
Ran somewhere in his veins, I always thought.
And Aphrodite, as was natural
In her own island home, had had her way
In plumping lips, in tilting almond eyes

And veiling their deep slumbrousness. Her touch
Lit up the flame beneath his umber skin.
Her hand voluptuously moulded him.

Menon found tongue the first: "So you've got
home
At last. Well, how did you leave Argos, Fan?" —
My guess had been correct. Magnes and he
Had been comparing notes. — "Magnes has proved
So rich an acquisition to our set,
Menon must too," the thought flashed over me.
And I gave Menon some of Magnes' due;
And all the gladlier that, in his whole person,
Something there was attracted me and held.
However we might strive — and strive we must,
Since we were Pheidias and Menon — yet
Deep in our hearts concern was mutual.
I longed to straighten that one strain in him
Which had seemed offishness, in former days;
And he too felt a guardianship of me —
A thousand things had proved it. To hold in
And moralize according to his view
My over-independence was his rôle
As friend to me, devotedly detached.
The fascination of his difference
Piqued me no less than it provoked. —
Not all
Of this came to my mind at once, of course,
In that brief meeting; you will understand

Foreshortening the fullness of the years.
But intuition is the artist's guide,
As it is woman's; and experience —
Of future, as of past — presents itself
Sometimes as life does to a drowning man,
In one swift view. Little there was to say,
And I begrudged a momentary halt
To say that little then. Menon had come
Again into my life; again to be
The mentor to my moodiness.
I took
Three stairs in one up the steep way, and came
Again, well winded, into the main stream
Just where it fouled and polished my old Hermes.
I laughed to find his smears were yet unwashed
Under his overhangs, and how the lichen
Had daubed him up with orange. Many feet,
Like ceaseless drops, had hollowed out the steps.
The bay tree flourished; my old scrapes were scars;
And how it reached and tossed, up in the blue —
Green bronze, curled, matted, like the pelt of beasts!
My heart was in my mouth. My pedagogue,
Grown grizzled and infirm, beside the door
In seated servitude still showed my way.
Under the peristyle beyond his room
The household all were gathered but the two
I came to greet as very home itself.
They lingered in the big room on beyond.

And oh, the utter loveliness of them!
The finest bloom of femininity!
As sculptor I have often had occasion
To judge the beauties of the fairest forms
That Hellas has produced, but there are none
That rank, in all my memory, with theirs;
So perfect each and yet so different.
My boyish recollection was at fault,
Just as in Menon's case, in that it saved
A lesser beauty than reality.
I had unconsciously accepted them
As an unquestioned part of life itself,
Lovely of course without comparison;
For why should one compare established forms,
Most lovely in themselves, with shifting shapes?
But now my eyes were opened to the truth
That these two women, who were very life
To me their son and lover, stood apart,
Not merely as it were by accident
Because they were my women, but because
Of being in themselves beyond compare.

The silver that had touched my mother's brow
But rendered her more venerable, far,
Removing her and lifting her beyond,
Almost beyond, the sphere of human passions
And substituting reverence for love,
Yet reverence most penetrating-dear:
Demeter, in her fullest motherhood.

But how shall I portray Persephone
There by her side, her daughter by all rights
Of love reciprocal and understood?
The blooming goddess of the golden corn
Were not more gracious nor more beautiful;
As if, within her ample daintiness,
Spring, changeful spring, with summer should contend
Whether her buddings were not rather blooms,
Her blooms not rather buds of promises;
For spring and summer were at one in her —
Perennial variety and lure,
Perennial abundance and repose.

There are no words in which to paint the joys
Of my home-coming. Let your own heart speak.
You too, Pantarkes, know the pain of loss
And you too know the bliss of once again
Renewing the fond ties of love. The days,
The all too few, the all too fleeting days,
That passed before I could enroll and go
To garrison for training, but confirmed,
Broadened, and beautified, the base of life.
As, at the time of my first coming on,
Love filled and satisfied my last desire,
And fixed ideals for me once for all,
So now, after my years of wandering
And, in withdrawal, testing of my power
To stand alone, I found again, in love,
Conviction and finality.

Too soon
My duties called me to the training camp;
Yet, with the shadow sweeping darklier on
Over my Attica and over Greece,
Not soon enough. It was a time of toil
And tearing. In the camp itself I found
The life almost intolerable. Skill
In rending and destroying, taking life,
Or, even more abhorrent, crippling it,
Went grindingly against the grain with me.
I loathed the implication of each stroke
We were so sedulously taught. The days
Were bad enough, when I could keep my mind
Fixed mostly on the act and not its purpose;
But night brought with it helplessness, in sleep,
Against persistent visitings. The thoughts
Inhibited in daylight took the tone
Of gloom immitigable, and the forms
That I was practising to cripple, rose
Reviling me as if the hateful deed
Had been already done.
My visits home,
Not too infrequent, were the hold on life
I needed. There, in the beloved warmth,
I could envisage clearly the large view
Of preservation which was what the camp
Taught us destruction for. And I went back
Reconciled, always, to learn how to kill,
Until I tried again to learn to do it.

It was the hard cold-bloodedness of camp
I hated; I could easily imagine
Being roused up to bloodshed till the deed
Was a delight only less sweet than love.
I often thought of Aeschylus the poet,
And how he fought, that day at Marathon.
I wondered if he too had gone to school
To learn the lessons he applied that day.
Somehow I hoped not. It seemed better art
To cut and hew in hatred and hot blood,
And unpremeditatedly.

But I
Had chosen; and I chose, too, to abide
By my decision; not inflexible,
But in a free obedience to commands
Of feeling that opposed itself to instinct;
Or rather of an instinct deeper even
Than any I had ever felt before,
Even than love. For one might sacrifice,
As I could readily conceive, one's love,
As life itself, for the deep inner truth
Where love should have its root. I could see why
It was so vital that one's love should be
Wholly at one with that deep inner truth,
Lest there be need to choose between the two,
As many, doubtless, though not I, must choose.
But I could not conceive the sacrifice
Of what was now at stake, hard as it was
To fix, or form, its airiness.

No words
Could quite define what we were fighting for,
Or learning how to fight for. It was not
Merely our homes, in any concrete sense,
Our families, our fellows, or our country.
Doubtless to yield without a stroke would have
Assured their safety better than to fight.
Indeed to fight against the Persian odds
Seemed but the surest way of losing them.
And there were many who upheld that view
And tentatively Medized even then,
Before the messengers had come to ask
For earth and water. But there was a soul,
A something final of divinity,
That led us on with ruthless exigence.
Not what we were, and not what we had been,
Determined action; what we were to be
In the dim future — not, perhaps, ourselves,
But coming generations — it was this
We fixed our eyes on, this that summoned us
To battle for the vision or to die.
Not what we come from, but what we go toward,
Controls.
Hardly a day but news came in
Of the advancing of the Persian host.
Its gathering at Sardis from all Asia
And far beyond, from Egypt and the south;
The pompous progress from his capital
Of the Great King to meet his myriads;

The leisurely assurance of their move
To ancient Troy, and there the sacrifice;
The building and the crossing of the bridge;
The channeling of Athos for the fleet;
The gathering momentum of advance;
The drinking of the Thracian rivers dry;
The famine of whole country-sides devoured;
The swift absorption of all governments;
The sweep of conquest to the gates of Greece:
All this we learned from day to anxious day,
A puny camp of fewer hundreds strong
Than there were Persian millions. And we felt,
All we young fellows in the Attic camp,
That we must be prepared to stand alone.
Persia was moving most of all against
Our Athens, for her deed at Marathon.
Even if all the rest of Greece escape
Annihilation by a timely truce
Athens must face destruction though she yield.

Then came the awful word from Delphi. Fate
Prepared extinction for the very name
Of Athens and Athenians. One hope,
And only one, remained — "the wooden wall."
But how interpret the inscrutable?
It was the counsel of Themistocles
Prevailed. The wooden wall? — it was the fleet;
And the best efforts of Athenians
Were centred there.

I felt a great chagrin
Not to be chosen for the force that sailed
For Tempe with Themistocles. "Too young;
Perhaps we'll need you later," were his words
When I one day approached him. But I read
Into his curt refusal something more
Than youth as his objection. In my heart
I knew I was no soldier, you can guess
From things that I have said. But harder far
Than soldiering, to sit and hear the news,
Helpless oneself, and nurse the secret shame
Of being second choice — or none at all.
Those weeks of waiting were the longest years
I ever knew. Out of my element.
Gods! how can people live who face all life
Kicking against such pricks? The news itself
Was bad enough, but to be useless too,
With nose upon the grindstone of a task
I hated!

But I was not quite alone
In misery, not wanted. Sophocles
Had to put up with being foot-bound too.
I knew he suffered; but from pain he pressed
A precious juice of comfort for his friend.
I seemed to see the blossom of his soul
Open in those hard hours. It was his first
Great disappointment, for life mostly smiled
Upon him. But he learned the secret then
Of Fate's dark workings in the human soul

Helplessly struggling with the will divine —
The secret of his genius.
Pericles,
By dint of tireless working with his friends,
Had won a chance to go out with the force
In some subaltern station. Strange it seemed
That youth, in him, was not enough objection
To warrant his denial. To us two —
Shelved shiftless — it made waiting more abject
To have him go. In our more reasoned moods
We were agreed that it was logical
For him to take precedence, for of course
He was a soldier and a man of parts
In public matters — Sophocles and I
Were naturally of another sort.
But in our eagerness to be of use
It was cold comfort to be well aware
How just our sentence was; and all the more
For our suspicion that, with Pericles,
Influence counted more than soldierhood
Even in his assignment. But perhaps
They are two phases of one thing.
As weeks
Went by and brought us news progressively
Bad, worse, and worst, we drew more close, each one
Relying on the other to maintain
Morale in uselessness. Themistocles
Again refused us, after his return
With all his force from Tempe, having learned

The enemy had found another route
To sweep Greece backward to Thermopylae.
A third of Hellas had deserted us.

From deep chagrin we fell into despair
When once again they sailed to offer fight,
Leaving us stranded. Artemisium
Was now their seaward goal, Thermopylae
The landward — almost at our door, and, worst
Of all misfortunes, no Athenians
In the contingent of Leonidas.
We useless lookers-on! and with one third
Of Greece carousing with the enemy,
And all the rest carousing at the games,
Olympia and Carneia at their height.

Then, suddenly, came the momentous word:
Leonidas had fallen, with his force.
The gates of Greece were open. Xerxes' train
Already swept within the mountain wall.
Greece had shrunk up into the merest shred
Of former greatness. Now the Isthmus was
The only bulwark — bulwark that left out,
Utterly unprotected, Attica.

At the same instant that the news came through,
The fleet winged back from Artemisium,
Preening our roadstead. Athens must withdraw.
Her fate was sealed. Indeed "the wooden wall"
Offered the sole escape.

And Pericles,
Even before the public proclamation,
Hastened to proffer us his helping hand.
We needed it. He was a friend at court
With influence that told; for those few weeks'
Campaigning gave him something of a grasp
Already on the reins that steered the team.
He had that genius. And it was through him
I got the chance to send the family —
All who would go, the women — by his ship
To Troezen, well beyond the Isthmian wall.

My heart sang when I saw them safely off,
Though then it seemed to be a last farewell.
A tempest of emotion shook me, pangs
At parting mixed with infinite relief
That they were gone, out of the sinking ship
Of Athens. Thanks to Pericles they were
Among the first. That agony was brief.

The second agony seems briefer still,
In retrospect. Within five days I saw
Attica drained of its inhabitants,
Cleaned, and dried up. And then, upon the sixth,
I saw the spate of Persia flood it full.
I saw it fling its plume of victory
High in the blue, when the Acropolis
Was given to the torch. A dazzling flare
Our fat old bay tree made. I did not see,

I felt, our roof-tree crumble from its place
And leave a void the years have never filled.

I owed to Pericles another thing.
In those short days, when all his hours were filled
With countless duties, he found time enough
For my affairs. He sought out Aeschylus
To ask if he would say a word for me.
Through him I shipped, at the last moment, with —
Ameinias, his brother! He it was,
You know, that afterward received the prize
For valour in the battle. Pericles
Had picked my place with his accustomed skill.
At length I was aboard, and fitted out
To put my lessons to the crucial test. —

We slept at Salamis, above the ships,
And from our camp-fires watched the smouldering —
All that was left — of Athens, while the chiefs
Wrangled about our tactics. In the dark,
Menon groped over from his company
To say good-bye. He had no hope at all.
"The gulf is full of Persians. Every cove
From here to Sunium's alive with them.
We're but a little bite of grass," he said,
"For those winged locust hordes. The chiefs are wrong
To tarry." Someone overheard his doubt.
"Who's that damned Medized coward?" came a growl.

And something harder than a growl flew by,
Without effect. Ameinias' whole crew
Were so for fighting that they would have stayed
To have it out if all the rest had fled,
As many wished to do.
Themistocles
Came with Ameinias before the dawn
And gave his last command: "Fight to the death!"
He rammed his order home to every man.
"There's nothing to be gained at all today
By half-way measures. There will be no call
For a retreat. 'Tis death or victory!"

He shuffled past me with that sidelong gait
Of his, as if his slender legs were aimed
Two ways at once, like his strange character.
I was surprised to have him know me, though
Such recognition was his stock-in-trade —
One of his many stocks. "Ah, Pheidias,"
He said, almost as to an intimate;
"I'm glad you're here. I told Ameinias.
You're better placed than if you'd gone with us."

I only half believed; he had the trick
Of saying things that merely smoothed one out.
But after all, perhaps he told the truth.
I was a hero with the men, a moment,
For his attention. And we all took pride
The more for being with Ameinias.

Themistocles went through the crowd that way,
Pricking his unleashed pack to the pursuit. —

We put off at the peep of dawn; straight out
Across the narrow strip of limpid blue
That leapt between the lines. Ameinias
Was headiest of captains, and our ship
Shot forward farthest. Then a signal came:
"Back water!" and from eager flight that seemed
Itself a victory we wavered. "Hell!"
I heard the captain mutter; "Let her go!"
And off she sprang again, but neck and neck
With mates. I had a sense of being held
In a great hand, a helpless pebble, flung,
One of a handful.
From our forward place
We could command a view of all our prows,
Just sun-caught, in a stiffened bow whose ends
Dragged back in narrows. But the Persian line,
Against the sun, ran on forever, south.

Our last glimpse of the battle as a whole.
Close quarters. Fighting — vicious clench and duel;
First, ship with ship, and then, ship after ship,
As if we crunched ripe fruits and spat them out.

We tackled first of all a fine Phoenician
All but broadside. She splintered on our beak,
And the shock spilt her brown skins in the sea.

But we drew out and grappled. My first taste
Of bloodshed then. A dusky brute jumped in,
Just of my size. Fighting was hand to hand.
A sickening smell of blood roused rage in me.
I struck out wildly. Suddenly I saw
A great red splotch of wetness on his breast,
And thinking: "You big gaudy beast, go home!"
I pushed him, most unsoldierly. The deck
Lurched up and tipped him overboard, as though
One pitched a quoit. I saw two whites of eyes
Merge with the foam; astonished, much, to see
Only surprise, no malice, in his face
As he went under, streaking foam with pink.

The day got dirtier; the dirty deck
Disgusting, viscid with red slime that stank.
The episodes of fighting swam to one
Continued bloody hack and ward and hack.
Courage? I know not how it is defined.
It would require more courage to leave off
Than to keep on, so caged inside that ship,
That slaughter-house. We kept our hacking up.

After a morning of a sword-like sun
Piercing our eyes, we seemed to see the end.
The deed was done by midday; after that
But little fighting — mostly driving off;
The Persians thought how pleasant were a cruise!
The sun now blinded them instead of us.

The turning came, as far as we could judge,
When Artemisia, the Carian queen
(Who should have fought on our side from the first),
Turned tail and ran. Ameinias at once
Set off in mad pursuit. —
We armed men rested,
But briefly. As we ran we drew away
From the thick battle, and on glancing back
I saw vile chaos. Gods! It nauseates
To see staunch shipping scrapped, good human stuff
Made garbage, shredded limbs and gaping heads
Scumming foul water, bodies bloated, blown,
Oozing like rotten wineskins in thick slime.
All that dishonoured clay! —
Our rest was up.
Imagine Artemisia the queen
Running down one of her own ships! She did!
And she escaped thus; for Ameinias
Could not conceive such treachery, and turned,
Thinking she had deserted to our side.

So we began our slaughtering again.
But from then on, one had not the same sense
Of glory and achievement. It was work,
Cool, calculated work. No more hot blood
Nor nausea. We had got our second wind.

Late in the afternoon a breeze sprang up
That helped the strangers off. From time to time

A quarry we had eyed slipped down the lee
Of Psyttaleia, and was gone. We had
To seek, not take what came.
The pallid east
Grew rosy from the setting sun — or was it
Reflected up from carnage-crimsoned seas?
Just at the last, or last that I remember,
Ameinias' right hand was lopped. I sprang,
For I was nearest him, and clutched his wrist.
He was quite cool. I trembled like a leaf.
He seized his tunic, tore the selvage off,
And wound it with his other hand, to stop
The pump of blood. He let me tie the knot.
And then he went on fighting, just as if
To finish a day's work. He waved commands
With the raw, handless arm, whilst wielding well
The other. And the last thing I recall
Is how that knotted clout flew like a flag
Of victory.
I do not know what happened;
Some smashing blow, no doubt, that laid me low.
The strangest thing of battles is, you fight
So blindly and alone. —

As I came to
I slipped through endless corridors, in search
Of something or of someone I had lost.
The world hung flaccid. I was reaping grain

And sowing — both at once. My father's lips
Kissed me. They gave pomegranate seeds. I lay
Under the cloak of Aeschylus. Prometheus
Reached down a fennel stalk. The flame inside
Was children making cakes of poppy seed.
Athena's serpent was asleep. His wings
Were veils about my loved one's golden locks,
Golden themselves, transparent. Spotted gold.
Freckles were signs of heroes. Golden locks
Were looser than were cropped, close, bushy ones,
And these were bloodier, like the sun at dawn.
But eyes were heavenly, at any rate,
Cleaning and strengthening. Where was the day? —

It seemed but natural that Myron's face
Should be there bending over me. The bees
Were buzzing busily. The air was rich
With a sweet autumn smell. The sun was high;
We lay beneath a sprawling bush through which
It sparkled so intensely that I closed
My eyes against its sharpness. There was peace.

When I looked out once more I saw the sea,
All silver shimmer in an azure world.
But through the shine how strange a pattern gloomed!
And then I understood. — But Myron there —
How did it happen? —
Long I lay and gazed,
Silent, just happy, looking into eyes

That were like woodland pools, where you step in
Out of the blaze, half fearful that the sky
All upside down is to engulf you, half
Longing to drown in depths of forest green.

It was some time before I had recovered.
But bit by bit, as I could bear it told,
Myron related how the brooding storm
From out the Orient had roused him up
At the indifference of Argos, sulking
Jealous of Sparta, jealous even more
Of Athens for the headship. Right or wrong,
He felt she Medized. And he heard from home
Boeotian loyalty was not assured.
Between those camps' pro-Persian sympathies
He visioned Athens as the champion
Of Hellas and of all that Hellas meant
To man, to art, to beauty, to the world.

Against the current of Medizing Greeks
He Hellenized more loyally, and planned,
The very soonest he could get away,
To cross the water and to join with us.
As usual, his pocket kept him there
In Argos for a while, or would have done
Had nothing else detained him. He had built
A nest in which to guard his brooding bird;
And when at last he held his son in arms

Life seemed so warmly luring he delayed,
And still delayed some months, his coming on;
Till finally he had but made them safe —
The golden fledgling and the mother-bird —
When the storm burst.
He heard Athenians,
Three hundred crowded shipfuls, had been brought
Across to Troezen, and he thought of me;
Doubtless my people all were refugees,
Perhaps at Troezen. And he made his way
Afoot across the mountains to the town,
To seek for them.
They were not hard to find.
Amid the press, my mother had assumed
A part in keeping with her ardent soul.
With widowhood, the rearing of three boys,
Who each inherited something from her
Of individuality, had built
Her native strength to easy potency.
She might have stood alone in any crowd
And given orders. In that helpless mass
Of terror-stricken women she was queen,
And Myron could not miss her.
Would I might
Have had a chance to see those two grow friends!
They had two days, at most, to do it in.
But life is short, and in such earthquake shocks
Is swift indeed. And truth to tell, each knew
And valued much the other from my talk

Before they met. So they were well prepared,
And they began acquaintance on the plane
Of friends already tested.
Her gray hair
And her free manners placed her in a rank
Unique for him, who had been wont to class
Freedom with license, and respect with veils.
In him she recognized at its full worth,
In that emergency, the vigorous
Unselfishness of his virility.
She looked upon him almost as a son;
And as a son, though with perhaps more show,
He worked for her well-being; found a house
Where she could have, for all the family,
Comfort and privacy; he laid the train
For food and fuel; made her, in a word,
At home, with all her women. —
And that one
Who signified to me a thousandfold
More than all others? Had I had my choice
I could not have selected better means
To guarantee her happiness and safety.
Myron well knew, of course, our loverhood,
And nothing could exceed his delicate
Restraint, respect, devotion. This I know
Not from himself, but her, and from my mother.
The very freedom of relationship
In those wild times when every wall was down
Did but establish safety, side by side

With license — safety for those strong to stand,
And license for the weaklings.
Just as soon
As he had seen my people housed and fed,
Myron proceeded to work out a way
To reach Aegina, from which he was sure
He could get passage to us. True enough,
The first news that he heard on landing there
Was: Aristeides had been summoned home
From exile in the island, and his ship
Was manning for the voyage. Ancient ties
Of guest-friend hospitality between
Their families were all he needed, thus,
To win a place; except that one can read,
Between the lines of Myron's own account,
That his fine person stood him in good stead.
No more superb or soldierly physique
Took part at Salamis.
While we had slept,
Their trireme, under cover of the dark,
Crossed over, and at dawn slipped swiftly through
The tightening line of Persians. All that day
Myron had fought with Aristeides' men
Against the hosts of Xerxes; then at last,
When they were fleeing, landed with the rest
On Psyttaleia, where the Persian guards,
Their noblest men, were stationed in reserve,
And like a devastating scourge of God
Wiped out the enemy.

When night had come
He went throughout the mingled crowd of Greeks —
Dead, wounded, living — high on Salamis,
To look for me; and when he found me, dead,
Or seeming so, he bore my body off
Into a quiet place far from the crowd
And nursed me back to consciousness. His love
Had called my soul up from the deeps of death.

When things had righted somewhat and the foe
Withdrawn, after Plataea, leaving Greece
To breathe again, Myron soon brought about
Reunion with my family, who came
To Salamis, so as to be at hand
And ready to resettle; and he thus
Took headship of our household management
That years of friendly intercourse would not
Have given. For Panaenus was engaged
In army service and could not be spared
For mere domestic duties; and of course
My other brother was too young to take
A leading part at home as yet. My health
Was so much shattered that I was relieved
Of all responsibility.
Some time
Indeed elapsed before they thought it right
Even to move me. It had been decided,
Upon reports received that all was safe,
We should ensconce ourselves in the old farm

At Mount Pantelicus, awaiting times
When Athens should be livable once more.

Meanwhile we ran our small establishment
Out in the open, with some rough stockades
Instead of walls, and mostly sky for roof.
And here my mother was the autocrat
And centre of a circle, from the first;
Receiving all the anxious friends who came
To pay respects and ask for news of me,
And rounding out a rough and ready court
Among the stranger refugees. So soon
And easily will folk adapt themselves,
Each, on the new stage, playing his old rôle.

The day we moved, Menon appeared, to offer
His services. My mother, though, declined;
And Myron, who then met him first, flared up
Inside, as I sensed quickly, though he showed
But careful coldness. Menon, for his part,
Was kindliness itself. But Myron felt
He should have sooner shown an interest.
In such chaotic times I easily
Surmised impediments, but Myron drew
Conclusions sweepingly severe. My friends
Began acquaintance at cross-purposes.
And ever since, the two have held aloof.
Infinitesimals in men's affairs
Are magnifying lenses of the men.

Not much more than a year had passed since I
Came home from Corinth and saw Athens first
With eyes of conscious understanding. Now,
In the wake of Persia, what a woeful change!
All the glad beauty of the Attic plain
Disconsolate; Athens, a place of ghosts
And noisome crumblings of the haunts of men;
Her gardens and her orchards black and bleak,
Her temples all dishonoured or destroyed,
Her hearthstones desecrated. Evil birds
Flapped up with hoarse cries as we went, and hovered
On moveless wings in shadow-casting swarms,
Gloating to seek again their scavengery.
There was no city. All was desert, death,
Scourged by the footsteps of the conqueror.

We made our way to where our home had been.
The thick clay walls had tumbled in a heap,
The timbers, every vestige of them, gone.
A skulking animal had made its den
Under some rotten ordure, and sneaked off
Insanely trepidatious when we came.
Ye gods! What foulings of sweet memories!
And when they bore me up, at my demand,
Into the citadel — oh, loathsome sight!
Abhorrent shards of shattered loveliness.

But in the midst there was one cheerful thing:
The sacred olive tree beside the shrine,

Losing no time in putting forth again,
Already reared a shoot an arm in length.
It heartened me to cast my eyes abroad;
And gazing on the desolated land,
Nakedly sculptured and with no details
Of human interest to interfere
With plastic simpleness, I gained a new
Conception of its forms: a bosomed plain
Ready to suckle yet a quenchless race.

PHEIDIAS

V

ATHENS AGAIN

PHEIDIAS

V

ATHENS AGAIN

Our life out at the farm, which we had planned
To be the briefest sojourn, grew to be
A long and most endearing episode —
An inset of subdued but glowing colour
In a life field of sculptural relief.
A veil had fallen, shutting off today
From yesterday. I find it hard to picture
The psychic change that had been brought about
By what had passed. It was as if a god
Had made another Pheidias of me;
As if I had returned into the womb
And been reborn from Hellas' travailing,
And born a new and different kind of man.
Even my memory at first was gone.
I passed again through childhood, youth, and love,
Pulling up gradually to the brink
From which I plunged into the battle tide —
Baptismal metamorphosis. Once there,
And once more holding firmly by the past,
I seemed to lie upon the life-washed shore
And see the stream rush past me, motionless

Myself, and listless; nothing to desire,
Nothing to do, but to accept the love
And tender care that curtained me around
And made inertness easy.
Myron there,
And my beloved — ministering, both,
To every slightest wish I might conceive,
Suggesting things before I asked for them —
Made my life fuller in a human sense
Than I had ever known; fuller perhaps
(Who knows?) for having no room filled with art.
For though art is the artist's gift to love,
The sublimation of his love itself,
Yet humanly his heart may seem aloof
And his love suffer for the loftiness
Even of loverhood. As I lay there,
Rather a mere spectator of my life
Than active part of it, and saw those two
Completers of my soul, living for one
Whose love for them could mean so little then,
I caught a vision of the perfect love,
And lived the vision. For to see those two,
To be with them, to have them both at once,
Was heaven, and I asked for nothing more
Than to lie on my lifted bank forever
And let life flow. It was a grateful thing
To see them friendly to each other thus,
The sunny and the ruddy, so alike,
And yet so different, some filial tie

Of spirit — brother, sister — binding them,
And binding them to me, though each to me
With bonds so far unfilial and so far
Each from the other in their character.

Myron did not stay long at any time
Except at first, while I was helpless yet.
Already he was actively engaged
In reconstruction work in Athens, where
The word of Aristeides had made good
His reputation as a man of men.
His gallant carriage throughout Salamis
Had spread his fame, and Athens' welcoming hand
Fixed him thenceforward as Athenian.
He fetched his family from Argos soon
And settled here for good and all. He came,
However, frequently to spend a day
With us. "It's better than a boon," he said,
"To find a home and family like this,
All made to order in a stranger land,"
As if the favour were to him, not us.
But how we could have done without his help
I do not know, for life was hard, at best.
He always brought out something from the town
(The market having been established first)
And put his shoulder to the many wheels
Of country life where men were in demand.
You can imagine it. But best of all
Was the good cheer he brought us. Every time

He came, I felt he lifted us a peg
And put a strut of metal in my back
To stay my limpness.
Thus, in time, I gained
Something of my old poise and vigour; but
For all that I could feel, my art was gone.
I had no impulse, no creative need,
No vision. Life in that one way — lost — lost.
Long months I lived the common life of men,
And loved it. People sometimes say: "How fine
To be an artist! How I envy you
Your vision of the beautiful!" — You know,
The averages are about the same
For all. I know from my experience.
One of the happiest times that I have known
Was in those long, unprodded, plodding months
Of physical recovery. No tease,
No drag, no urge to do, nor to create,
Nor to express, and no imagination
To lure me on, and dash me down at last
Unsatisfied; only the common lot
Of labour, love, and reconstructing rest.

The days were all alike, except as seasons
Changed from brown autumn to the green of spring,
And farmers' duties with them. Now and then,
And oftener than we had dared to ask,
Friends would come out, a welcome supplement

To Myron's assiduity. Through them
We lived the life of Athens actively
By proxy.
Pericles came oftenest.
We talked Acropolis and how it cried
To be developed, now that it was clean,
As one great work of sanctuary art.
More often still he wrote to me; the town
And fashion (for already life returned,
Though with restricted means, to social state)
Kept him in Athens, when he was not off
On public tasks of war or embassy.

And Sophocles contributed. He came
Whenever he had written anything
He wished to offer to the dog; he claimed
He could unerringly check up effects
By trying-out on Myron and myself.
If we agreed, why, he would hold the crowd,
Or lose it, as it might be; if we clashed,
He might address a special audience,
But not the one he wished, which was the world.

Magnes came too sometimes. When he had gone
We saw just how ridiculous we were.
He came, not to try out, but to show off —
And to pick up. But he brought something too,
I can assure you; for he put a stick
In daily life for us, and stirred us up,

So that, on settling, having dropped our dregs,
We saw life clearly, cleanly.
Menon came.
But every time, Myron had something else
Upon his calendar that called him off,
As it were automatic. Menon too
Mistrusted him. It positively was
A farce, or melodrama — both of them
At once, most often — to see those two men
Avoiding contact, gearing to their use
Social mechanics, to avoid offence.
Strange as it seems, a sort of jealousy
Sprang up between them, of which I took note
As principal, although I washed my hands
Of any guilty knowledge of the cause.
The nearest an avowal that we came
Was one day at the quarry.
We had gone —
The family and Myron — to my haunt
Of childish memories, to spend the day
And picnic. Myron was the honoured guest;
It was his birthday and he had his choice
Of celebrations — all a deep-laid scheme
Of his, he told me since, to stimulate
In me, by every means, the pulse of art
That slept. While we were celebrating thus,
Menon appeared, unasked and unannounced —
The awkwardest encounter he had had
With Myron. Neither one could well withdraw.

Yet neither wished to stay. Menon, in fact,
Had never won into my mother's most
Distinguished graces, and his calls remained
But personal attentions to myself;
At least they always had that look; so now
Our little party was divided up
Insensibly by veilings of degrees
Of intimacy. Menon sat with me
And talked his budget out, while Myron strayed,
Or set himself to putting things to rights
After the banqueting. My mother, throned
A venerable goddess crowned with snow,
Directed everybody at some task,
And Myron was the servant in the house
With my beloved and the rest. It warmed
And cheered me to remark his easy grace
In his new rôle, and how he was a part,
Without assumption, and unconsciously,
Of our home group. But Menon fixed his eyes
Upon the golden beauty that was there
Engaged with Myron in such friendly ways,
And I could see his admiration grow
The more he gazed. No wonder. He could judge
Of beauty both as artist and as man;
In either one of those capacities
He could not question her pre-eminence.
The fact that she ignored him heightened her,
I dare say, in his estimate. For me,

I felt a pride in his mute tribute, free
From any twinge of the green monster, solely
Because I knew there was no danger there.
As I was hers, so she was mine. No fear
Clouded my title. When he rose to go
Menon made bold to look from her to Myron,
His mind unmasked, although to me alone.
"Is that all right, old man?" I rather saw
Than heard, so eloquent his glance. I laughed
And did not even answer. But I read
As in a manuscript the secret source
Of mingled streams of feeling in his heart,
Involving her, and Myron, and myself.

When he had gone, and afterward, his glance
Came back to me, suggestive of a thought;
A thought I had to face and grapple with:
Myron and my beloved — complements
That made my perfect whole — could blindfold life
Ever so twist the strands between those two —
Between those two and me — that fate might not
Know how to disentangle the snarled skein?
I could not look into their cloudless eyes
And question my position in their hearts.
There was no doubt in me, no jealousy,
Nor anything that even looked that way;
But still, as man and man, as man and woman,
There were the sole essential elements

Of tragedy — I saw it plain as day.
Between us and such drama there was nothing
But insubstantial film of loyalty.
Menon's sharp glance had shorn the veil away
From my fool's paradise. I knew the price
That I must give for lasting happiness —
The heart's own price of perfect love to her,
And perfect trust and loyalty to him.
Thus, and thus only, inhibitions grow,
Tougher than thongs of sinew and more sure
Than walls of legal adamant. —
As part
Of Myron's scheme to reach and stimulate
The sleeping artist in me, he would bring,
Whenever he came out from Athens, something
That might evoke response — some work of art
That he or others had been conjuring,
Or some old heirloom that had been preserved
By miracle from chaos: now a gem,
Carved in antique convention; then a bronze,
Bright from the chaser's hand; a figurine
Of tawny clay; a painted jar; a jewel. —
They did not interest me. I was cold
And critical. They did not satisfy.
I had been through all that; why start again
Turning the ruthless treadmill? What was said
Was said — why should one care to say again,
Or hear, the parrots' repetitious words?
One thing and only one could justify

The facing of the artist's agony
By me again — the true creative urge.
I felt no stirring of the vital spark.
I lay there fallow, ready for the seed
But yet unseeded; ready for the spring
While yet no swallows —
Then, one April day,
Myron came out with a great mystery
In a small parchment roll. He was excited
As I had rarely seen him, quite as if
He treasured up some sacramental thing,
A talisman of godhead, a divine
And sacred oracle vouchsafed to him
To open up the future course of life.
His keenness keyed me up to swift response.
I felt a fate within the guarded roll.
We neither of us could endure to wait,
But hastened to undo it.
Tenderly
He loosed the thong, and laid the parchment flat
Under my eyes without a word: a sketch,
Penned lightly, swiftly, with the uttermost
Economy of means, and full of vigour;
Fancy, let loose, in method; life itself
In character. I never yet had seen
Anything like it. Simple as it was,
And wholly unpretentious, there was that
In its whole aspect which proclaimed a soul:
Instant perfection and the open eye.

Myron was silent, but was breathing hard.
He gave no explanation. Not a glance
Betrayed how he was waiting for a word
From me. Would I see what he wished me to? —
What I saw was a message from a friend
I did not know existed; Myron saw
The same — our feeling was coincident.
It is unfathomable mystery
How souls can signal thus through empty air,
And over time, to claim a brotherhood
And recognition; in our company
We felt another present who made us
More one for being also one with him,
Whoever he might be.
Myron and I
Vied with each other, searching out the points
Of the small masterpiece. Its new attack
On life was what most struck us, first of all.
It was a scene upon the farm in spring.
All stiffness of convention had been dropped.
The figures were as simply natural
As if they were alive, and they were grouped
With utmost freedom, though the groups composed
With rhythmic subtlety, unsought but sure.
The spacing of the pattern was a joy —
So startling in its contrasts, so resolved
To unity and balance. Drapery
Was inspiration, in its sensitive
Variety and charm. The line was pure

And accurate, but bold beyond belief —
Incomparable combination. Skill
Rivaled imagination; vigour, skill.
But best of all the wonders was the way
In which the faces told the inner thought —
A revelation of the range of art. —

A glimpse of work like this made old art stale;
No wonder I had felt my long distaste
Was justified. But in these vivid lines
There lived a pioneer of greater things.
A new life opened to my eager eyes;
I felt myself an artist once again;
I felt imagination stirring, deep
Within my consciousness. I felt my soul
Awake again at last.
Then eagerly
I asked about the artist. Myron knew
But little. He had come upon the sketch
In the collection of a wealthy man,
One of our common friends, and one indeed
Whose fate was strangely mingled with my own —
Kimon, the son of the Miltiades
Whom I had witnessed chief among the Greeks
At Marathon, the sculpture of whose form
At Delphi was my first command, who sent
My loved one down to us from Scythia;
Kimon the profligate we knew him then,
But destined later to be chief of state;

Always the lover and the gatherer
Of art and artists, with the surest eye
For genuine and for the future great.

The sketch had come from friends of his abroad
Among the islands; for his tastes were known,
And many sent him tribute, both for his
And for his father's sake. Miltiades —
Of the great family of Aeacus,
The consort of the daughter of a king,
Despot in person of the Chersonese —
Bequeathed a net of friendships to his son
That covered the Aegean; Kimon held
And strengthened all the strands, and gathered-in
A haul of artist booty not less rich
For that disordered time than Pericles
Today, whose sire Xanthippus brought the charge
Against Miltiades that laid him low.
So richly does my life enweave with theirs
The silken warp and woof of kings of men,
In figured tapestry of history.

"They say the artist is a nobleman,"
Myron explained, "of Thasos; several years
Older than we are, rich and powerful,
Who paints for pleasure, and will not accept
The smallest fee. His name is Polygnotus."

From that first glimpse into the painter's field,
Opened by the great artist, I took up

With zest renewed my tasks of artistry,
But in reversed precedence. Until then
I had held scuplture first in point of worth
(Or say in point of nativeness to me)
And practised painting as a second art,
Less big and so less exigent; less grave
And more amusing, like a pleasant play
After hard work; or else as a short-cut
And service method to sketch out my thoughts
Or flat my modeling. I crossed, you see,
Hegias' dicta with Ageladas'.
And even now it was the exigence,
The toilsomeness, of sculpture that repelled,
In my long after-battle lassitude,
At the same time that painting drew me on
With feminine and lotus-bank allure;
Though, thanks to Polygnotus, to a land
Where art was genuinely worth the while,
Not merely soft. Then too the field unplowed
Was tantalizing to my jaded sense;
I had the feeling I had reaped the grain
Of sculpture — change it for another crop.
Sometime I might return if I found seed
That promised richer harvest. For the time
Painting engrossed me — for a long, long time.

Panaenus, who had painted from the first,
Took a great interest, when he returned
After long service in the war, and gave

His best assistance to me. But his years
Were just enough to separate us two
Without empedestaling him. His help
Lacked both a master's full authority
And sympathetic student-fellowship.
As one so often sees in families,
We stood apart, each loving well the other
And proud indeed of what the other did,
But making discount of relationship,
Less psychically close for common blood.

But then, the artist works alone at best;
He gathers kin of soul from the free field
Of all humanity and of all time;
And that is tantamount to loneliness
In any human sense. His fellowships
Themselves are apt to leave him lonelier
Along the trail to the remotest heights
Of individuality of view —
Else genius were not genius.
We remained,
Panaenus and myself, agreed to stay
Each on his own sure ground — aloof, though loving;
So that, while paralleling in our route,
And almost coinciding in our goal,
We traveled by ourselves; and when at last
Came opportunity, by Micon's voice,
And not Panaenus', my chance fell to me —
No nepotism there.

The question was
Of mural paintings in the portico
That had been built fronting the market place,
For recreation and a monument
To Athens' glories, and especially
Her Persian victories, the increment
Of her Aegean empire. Kimon wished
To illustrate in most effective style
The history of Hellas, pointing it
With Athens'.
Micon — then, you know, the dean
Of Attic painters — was entrusted with
Experienced responsibility.
Panaenus, his associate in name,
His chief in genius, showed the way as artist,
While Micon set the pace as manager.
I slipped in somewhere under, willing aid
To their two highnesses. And over all —
A cloud of greatness brooding our small world —
Was Polygnotus; not in presence yet,
But still controlling from his distant isle
By correspondence and by conference
The conduct of the mural as a whole.
I got an inkling how to organize
From that experience — what not to do,
What to do. —
After Polygnotus came
Things went more smoothly, though. And I learned
much

From that great master. All the older men
Whom I had thus far met and studied with,
For all their greatness, were behind the times,
Dealt in tradition solely; but this man,
While standing, he too, on a ground secured
Upon tradition, looked out all serene
Upon the future. Young men come to be —
Well — pessimistic, as to forwardness
In older artists, and to look for it
In their contemporaries only. Ah,
But forwardness is not a thing of years,
But of the soul — as Polygnotus proved.
He opened wide my eyes to many things.
Although, in truth, he then was in the prime
And fullest flush of life and genius, still
To a young fellow like myself he seemed
Almost old-master, just as Micon did;
Enough to be my master, anyway.

I loved him. He had come into my life
Like sun and downpour to the garden plot,
Like song of birds and perfume to the spring,
The promise to the bud of blossom time.
From that first sketch which Myron brought to me
I caught a message, wafted to my sense:
There was a soul of greatness far away
In the mysterious foreign universe
That from the Persian storm-cloud washed our shores

(Thasos was Persia's, though her sons were Greeks);
And from that moment I had never ceased
To draw an inspiration from his works.

Kimon took pleasure in my interest;
Found means to gather more of his fine things;
And later, when the portico was built,
Sought Polygnotus' counsel; gave to him
A sort of loose control of the whole work
From his far island; brought him down at last
To Athens to complete the splendid whole
With his own masterpiece the Sack of Troy.
Thus I had come within his influence
Progressively, from that impressional,
Imbibing springtime, through the summer bloom,
Until I stood, within his generous,
Perennial benignity, a friend,
Our ages neutralized.
A quality
Of mine that Polygnotus brought to birth
Was face-expression, crucial to the taste
I had conceived for portraiture, in which,
Little by little, I was recognized.
My best success had been with Pericles,
Who gave me sittings very frequently;
Whose aspect also I could visualize
Most vividly in absence. Memory
I trained to such assurance that I had
No need at all of sittings; in this way

I got my best effects, eliminating
All non-essentials to bring out the type.

I worked a long time on Miltiades
From memories of childhood, and attained
What Kimon treasured as his perfect likeness.
In fact it served as model for his face
In Micon's and Panaenus' Marathon.
My painted portrait of Miltiades
Was basis too for Kimon's rich command
Of sculptured portraiture — Miltiades
Amid a throng of kindred hero-gods,
To be set up at Delphi near the shrine.

Menon had scouted, Myron had upheld,
The thought of me as painter. In a way
Menon was right. I was a sculptor born
And but a painter bred, or born again.
And yet it is a narrow view of life
That would restrict the artist to one art.
Of course, I grant, the danger is two stools
To fall between; but that is not to say
That if he stand on one he may not find
A second well worth while to sit upon.
Myron felt that, provided I returned
To my true art, of sculpture, it would be
Most certainly advantaged — trued and softened —
By working at the other art as well.

I even go so far as to believe
No artist realizes freest power
If his foundation be not broadened out —
Potentially, in sympathy of view
And understanding, if not practised skill —
To underlie the fullest range of art.
An artist is as big as he is born;
If he is born an artist in two kinds,
So be it — he should reach his size in both;
If mediocrity in both of them,
I see no reason to suppose in one
He might attain distinction. Menon's way,
And Hegias', would rule the other out —
But which one? If there is a preference
By nature, that is the arterial,
The others bypaths, from which to feed-in
Enriching streams of human interest.

In my case there can be no doubt, I think,
That Polygnotus, with his painter's view,
Helped-on my sculpture in more fertile ways
Than stricter sculpture-practice could have done.
As you must surely recognize, I am
A sculptor with the painter's influence;
And yet a sculptor straight through to the bone,
A worker in the idiom of form
In the full round. Yes, even in relief,
Which is half painting, always in the round
I feel my figures — as I feel my life,

Though I am telling it as narrative
In sequence.
The Miltiades required,
With its supporting figures, endless time,
Unstinted toil. It symbolized to me
Athens herself — her history, her life.
First was Miltiades, in whose one form
Athens, and all of Hellas, was made man.
He stood in glory as I saw him stand
Upon the field of Marathon; a man,
And yet, for majesty, a very god
In awful action — Zeus Omnipotent,
Holding aloft the lightning in his hand.
Upon his right and left, the patron gods
Apollo and Athena, mystical
In treatment, and archaic, dim, retired,
As buttress and as background and as foil
To the impassioned figure of the man.
And then, beyond the triple unity,
Ten hero-gods of tribes, eponymous;
To each I gave a special character
To tell the story of the ancient time,
Identifying each an element
Of social entity and greatness, each
A bond with godhead's other-worldliness.
These were severe in their high dignity,
And yet, beside the others, humble — art
Half earth, half child — and summary in mode,
Reserved but not archaic; and a laugh

Their homely speakingness had also. Then,
Here too, as in the Lovely Lemnian
(Which I have yet to tell you of, I know),
I brought a soul of ideality
Into the fabric. Not thirteen stiff forms,
Detached and ranged as individuals
To be enjoyed in sequence, one by one;
But most of all — this is the point! — as one
Composed and close-related whole. In this
Perhaps I made departure most from rule
And precedent; as well indeed I might,
Not being bound, as in a temple group,
By canons of religious exigence,
To priestly, separate rigidity;
Or, as in metope or pediment,
To keep the frame, and not to strike a note
Too off the key of aspect as a whole,
Too out of scale or individual.
Here art alone was master — art, I mean,
Of sculpture for its own sake — with no call
To meet conditions of external shapes
Imposed by architecture on the group.
First, I was free to fix the general form
And mould my profile to abstract desire;
Then, to develop inner light and shade,
Unhampered (and unhelped) by other forms
Adjacent, predetermined; finally,
Free to adjust the spot-significance,
To tease the eye of mind with mind of eye,

To supple, and enrich with meaning, form.
Thus all the figures held together, each
Responding to the next — confirming it,
Opposing it — and each one playing up
To the heroic form that centralized
And that coordinated all the group.
You see how different the whole thing was
From the dry posing of archaic art.

Menon, as representative of school,
Was shocked and scandalized by the offence
I flung so cavalierly in the face
Of old tradition; most of all, condemned
The touch of humour in the attributes
With which I pricked into the consciousness
Of the spectator personality
In the supporting mass of demigods.
He even talked of blasphemy — in jest,
No doubt, although he seemed quite serious.
But Myron's taste confirmed me in my own:
It brings the heroes nearer to the heart
To give a homeliness like that to them;
Their godhead is no less for humanness.
I can see Menon's point; for man, to him,
Is a degraded being, other kind,
And baser stuff, than gods and heroes are.
It is a sort of qualm, one must suppose,
That cannot tolerate a kindredness
Between immortal gods and mortal men.

But though I see his point I disagree;
For man, to me, is fabric of the gods,
One stuff with them, potentially themselves;
Less in degree, less purified, less free,
But of their being, one at heart with them;
Descended from them, seeking up again
To shed this close-constricting shell, and rise
To the intensity and freedom of their power.

The group of the Miltiades was full
Equivalent to thirteen works of art,
Each special, though contributing to one
Great composition; far too big a task
For ease or speed. And Kimon was content
To have its progress slow. It in a sense
Seemed like my whole career. It underlay,
And was the background of, all of my projects
As central interest for many years.
Figure by figure I was building up,
And building into it, an epochal
Presentment. And it gained enormously
In wealth of meaning and in mellowness
Of modeling — in ripened quality —
By standing by while lesser orders sped.
After the first, when I was well assured
Enthusiastic confidence from friends,
And Kimon most of all, for my rough studies,
Commands came in faster than I could work;
But thanks to my great undertaking, time

Was stipulated for in none of them.
I worked at pleasure, master of my soul,
Nor urged, nor irked, by petulance of pride
Or penny-counting, art-forgetting pressure.

Thus I produced in those long, fruitful years,
Without anxiety or haste, a score
Or more of works of rather varied type;
Varied enough to give sharp tang to life.
The first that I completed was the bronze
For the Acropolis, colossal size,
Athena Promachos; ambitious work,
Too big for fineness in the open air.
Mys was my helper, and Perasius,
In working out the shield. My youthful claim
On popular esteem was proved by it;
One sees it, and it profiles very well,
But it is immature.
The same is true
(As to ambitiousness in the attempt)
Of my Plataean statue, made of wood
Gilded, with tinted marble for the nudes;
Athena this one too, and better done
As abstract modeling, but leaving much
For later years to better as to style.
This was the one that I have told you of,
My tribute to Plataea's Marathon.

Many are the Athenas I have made —
A grateful task for an Athenian.

Six of them showed the way for this, my last,
Which we unveil today: Pellene first,
That capped my study with Ageladas;
Then Promachos and the Plataean maid;
Miltiades' Athena, in the group;
Civic Athena, with the city keys;
And best of all, the Lovely Lemnian.

It was with this that I escaped the past,
And freely struck at length my final pace.
To her and Zeus alone my name is signed —
The shining landmarks of my artistry.
I had been striving for a kinder mode
Than the old sculpture, whose inhuman chill
Set the work off from ready sympathy.
The way was shown by Polygnotus' painting;
And I had sought, in many vain attempts,
To find for sculpture something of the same
Amenity. It is another thing
To clothe a male art with a female charm,
Even suppose the subject female too.
I found my way at last the way of life;
I studied from the form right by my side,
The form I lived with, and that I adored
With all the strength and soul of manly love.
She freed my art, and suppled, and enriched,
As she had done my life.
I studied her
As Amazonian Hippolyte,

Recalling how she came from those far lands
Where women warriors lived in olden times,
To wed with Theseus, as with Athens' self,
Brought for that by our modern Heracles —
For so I wove the ancient legendry
Into our reminiscent human lives,
Dreaming myself as Theseus, Athens' self —
Not modest so, perhaps, but mystical.
The Amazon was popular; the more
For being human rather than a goddess
Except in beauty of the feminine;
It is of interest as well because
Of Polycleitus' rivalry; he sent
An Amazon competing with my own
At Ephesus and won the prize.
I rose
From the Hippolyte to Aphrodite —
Celestial Aphrodite — heavenly love —
Moulding pure beauty into awesomeness,
Attempting the all but impossible.
From virginal, through matronly, I rose
One more degree, the highest in the scale,
In Kybele, the mother of the gods;
Pregnant, enthroned, and with her lion guards
And mural crown; the Mother, realized.
For this I studied my beloved one
Through those most sacred and appealing months
When she was carrying my sturdy sons.

And so I stepped beyond the narrow bounds
Of incomplete experience, and took
The open road of mastery at last,
A man whose range of life was rounded out.
The Lovely Lemnian was the first fruit
Of the completed circle, and I marked
My manhood milestone with my signature.

You see how my beloved was in all
And through all that I did, all that I thought.
Oh, love was rich and satisfying then,
And swift progressive in its potency,
Its eager music rising from the soil
As rapturously as a lark in May,
With heartfuls to sing out and celebrate
A-wing through all the morning up the blue,
And zenithed at the burning noon of life. —

I have been telling you so much of love
That we have lost the Lovely Lemnian,
The milestone of adventure on my way.
But love and she were one. — The Lemnians
Wished a memorial of Miltiades
To be set up in the Acropolis
In honor of his conquest of their isle,
Which should be also an ex-voto gift
To Pallas, patroness colonial.
And it came to me thus to interweave
Of multicoloured threads my long life story
In fabric of imaginative thought —

To lay it down before Miltiades
As at the feet of the Omnipotent.
To him whose conquest of the Lemnian isle
Brought his preferment to the chieftaincy
The day we matched the Medes at Marathon,
And who thus first impersonated Greece
And godhead, both at once, to my child eyes;
To him who symbolized my whole career
As if he were beginning, background, end,
Of all my artistry — who had assumed
The rôle of father with the rôle of Zeus,
His sculptured form combining him with both —
Who was my copious fountain-head of life
In that he gave me my beloved one;
To him who loomed my Hellas-Father-Zeus:
I offered up the noblest masterpiece
That hand and soul of mine could fabricate.

Look at her as she stands with glance benign,
Downward but not down-putting; welcoming
Or bidding one farewell, as one arrives
Or goes, in the Acropolis — the first
To greet the coming, and the last to speed
The parting guest of Athens. Think of her
As beauty, love, and wisdom, three in one;
As beauty rounded into love's own form,
As love uplifted into wisdom's height,
As wisdom opened into beauty's flower —
The three in one the sum of life itself.

So only will you read aright the thought
That is suggested in the living bronze —
A goddess, yet a woman, and my own.
In it are bodied all the mellow years,
All the refreshing life, we knew together,
From childhood to the full maturity
That gave me power to realize at last
My dreams, my visions, my realities.
It is the ripened fruit of all the thoughts
That I had moulded, building up to it;
And even more the seed of finer thoughts
And higher lives beyond. The sculptor feels
More mystically than another man
The soul within the substance of his clay;
His clay, for all its grossness, to his eye
Is free translucent to the flame within
That quickens it. And so I feel that form —
That earthly form which love has made divine.

Something, though less than I feel, of all this
The people felt when we unveiled the bronze,
A burnished patina of cleanest gold
In opposition to the tarnished green
Of Promachos, close by, now long-since roughed
By the rude kisses of the briny west.
Something the people felt — they christened her.
And as the Lovely Lemnian she lives,
And will live always while the bronze remains
To prove her oneness with the hand that wrought,
The love collaborative with the hand,
And both with Athens whose pure word she speaks.

PHEIDIAS

VI

DELPHI

PHEIDIAS

VI

DELPHI

It was not long after I finished this,
My fairest monument to my beloved,
That I completed the Miltiades
With all the other figures of the group.
Myron accompanied me out to Delphi
To choose the site, and to erect the work.
We went by water as in former days
Over to Corinth, where we stayed a while
To see the town once more, and to renew
With keen emotion old-time memories.
There we took ship upon the other shore,
And tacked and tacked again across the gulf
Northward, to where a little river runs
Out of the Phokian wilderness, and halts,
Thrown back upon itself in open port,
Surprised so suddenly to find the sea;
No spot more barren-bleak, more desolate.
From there we pushed behind the coastwise hills
Where a hushed valley nurtured fruiting groves.
Beyond these levels of luxuriance
Our feet were set upon the intricate

And rugged pathway to the Delphic shrine,
Glimpsed from the shore an instant far away
Uplifted on its mountain; lost again
And lost to sight for good among the crags;
Until it flashed out suddenly at last
Around a jutting turn, where we beheld
Incredible magnificence of art
Shelved upon rough-hewn ledges, backed above
By the Phaedreiades — sheer, shining cliffs
That hover high, like wings, above the shrine.

The clay-built hamlet huddles as it can
Up terraced steps as of a theatre
Scooped from the mountain, crumbling boulder-gray
Upon a bouldered barren into which
It almost merges. But above the town,
And clasped by its last upward clamberings,
The Precinct scintillates — a matrixed gem —
With gleam of marbles and the flash of gold,
Sculptures and paintings, trophies, columns, gifts;
While over all, the haughty temple looms,
Clear though withdrawn, and luring though so cold.

We brought a letter to the family
Of the high-priestess of the Oracle;
And we were soon established in their home
Close by the gorge-cut spring of Castaly,
Within the shade of massive sycamores
That Agamemnon planted, it is said.

I could not stay to eat, as had been planned
By our good hostess, who expected us;
But arm in arm with Myron went at once
Up through the village to the Precinct gate,
And took my way along the narrow path
That zigzags upward to the shrine.
Not far
Within the entrance gate I found a spot
Well suited to my sculpture, where the sun
Could search its secrets with a ranging eye.
I was astonished, and most fortunate,
To find thus still unoccupied a site
That seemed so obvious a vantage point
For sculpture. I suppose that, previously,
Everyone crowded up the hill, to be
Nearer the temple; but we wished to leave
An interval, as for recovery.
There was a reason too that fixed our choice,
Quite special to my sculpture: I desired
To place Miltiades so that the sun
Might give it aura and a mystery,
Which light directly on would take away.

The pedestal stood well back from the path,
With steps and a mosaic space between.
Beside it ran a long exedra, from which
The passer, halting for a bit, might gaze
Out over glen and mountain, far away.
Close by, the terraced slopes drop steeply down

Into the dell where Pleistus finds the level.
From there the plain is full of olive groves,
Meandering at leisure through the hills
Like a great gray-green river seeking sea.
Then, opposite, dun mountains leap again
To the bold skyline and the changing sky.
Only in one small wedge, where the lines dip,
And one range slides behind a nearer one,
You glimpse a tessera of sea, intense
Ultramarine. Oh, very beautiful!

The time of waiting for the bronze to come
(For it was shipped around by sea), I spent
Preparing pavement, seat, and pedestal.
And thus the weeks slipped rapidly away.
Hellas itself one sensed, feeling the throb,
The constant heart-throb, of Apollo's cult,
So isolated from the world at large
And yet so central to its consciousness.
Housed as we were with one of the town chiefs,
And busy by the gateway to the shrine,
We saw the pilgrims enter, day by day,
Reside, and leave, as if it were arranged.
So constant was the flow, the river seemed
To draw from springs perenially brimmed.
Athens, imperial metropolis,
Gathers-in guests from all the world; but she
Is flood enough herself for these to be
But foam upon the current. At the games,

As at Olympia, are gathered crowds
As varied, but for only a few days;
And they are gone before you get their gauge —
A sudden whirl of human dust that blinds,
Or dazzles, and disperses. Delphi, though,
Mere mountain village, has no life but this:
The consecrated service of the cult,
And entertainment of its visitors.
You feel the presence of the world at large
The concentrated essence of the place.
I was there long enough to get to be,
Or feel, almost an old inhabitant,
And to know Greece, and half the world beside,
In a parochial and gossip way
That is unique in my experience.
Who knows his Delphi knows humanity.

Myron delighted quite as much as I
In the new vision that was thus revealed,
And lingered on; to help me at my work
Was his excuse; but underneath I know
That something held him more than setting bronze,
Much as he loved the latter. It was one
Of his long haltings by the way of art
To drink of life itself. He never worked
But at white heat and intermittently;
The rest of life he played, though busy too
At handicraft or something you might think
In opposition to his interest;

A method wholly different from mine,
As you well know, for I am regular
As sunrise at the task. Do not conclude
That either his or my way is the best
Abstractly; every artist finds his own.

One of the pleasures of our sojourn there
Was Polygnotus' presence. He had come
To paint his second, greater, Sack of Troy,
And his Odysseus in the Under World.
Thus were renewed and strengthened ancient bonds
Of friendly intimacy. High immured
In blue, half way between the sea and sky,
And often lonely in the shifting crowd,
We made another Tripod — the third foot
In this new founding being elder kin,
Not younger, as in Polycleitus' case.
I loved to join the two in loving thought,
For they had much in common, strangers still,
Although each knew and loved the other's works.
In all the time since the old Argos days
I had but rarely met with Polycleitus,
Although we had continued intimacy
By frequent letters. But his friendly face
Came to me vividly of late, as if
His spirit somehow hovered close at hand,
Almost as if his hand rested in mine
And we were comrades just as long ago.

It may be Polygnotus' friendliness,
The thought of the new Tripod and the old,
Had brought him closer. Polygnotus played,
Though so much older, Polycleitus' rôle,
In supplementing Myron and myself
With fire of inspiration. But his mind —
Temperament apart — was limitless.
To be with him was to live history;
The poets were his fellows, and the world
His plaything. Nothing but to hear his voice
Was a refreshment — body, mind, and soul.
Widely as he was known, and free to go
And come as common citizen of Greece,
The train of pilgrims seemed a train of friends
Of Polygnotus; and the Cnidian Club,
Which he was painting, was the rendezvous
Of half the comers to the Oracle.
I have heard brilliant discourse many times —
There surely is no lack of it at home
Among my friends — but never have I heard
Delicious conversation such as his;
So fresh, so flowing, sparkling so with wit,
So kindly in his kindled listening.
And I have never known a warmer heart
Or firmer fibre of humanity.

Work marched effectively, and we had put
The last completing touches to the task.
Next morning we had planned to say good-bye

To Delphi and the friends that we had made,
When Fate decreed the turning of my road.

We had been hearing news disquieting
Of Kimon's difficulties, the decline
Of his great popularity. And now
Fullest corroboration of it came:
He had been ostracized. The very day
On which I had completed the commission
Entrusted to me many years before,
I learned the story of his casting out.
The life-depletion that an artist knows
When he has finished an important task,
I felt on finishing Miltiades;
And this, by Kimon's sudden banishment,
Was magnified to a catastrophe,
As if the basis of the world were gone.
Although between us there had never been
Such sympathy as most endears two friends
And makes their souls inseparable, still
In our relations there was cordial warmth,
And, on my part, sincerest recognition
Of his true greatness and beneficence;
And furthermore the feeling of a fate
That bound our lives in one. His banishment
And my completion of his father's bronze,
Like others of my intimate concerns,
Were so coincidental that I felt
A mystic pre-arrangement of my life.

The fall of Kimon marked a terminal,
And a beginning, in my life career.

It might have been somewhat embarrassing
For me to be in Athens at that time.
Kimon was head and front of my support;
I was identified in people's minds
Not only with the man but with his group,
Though I had never taken any part
In politics, except as no-one here
Can quite escape. But now the strange thing was
That Pericles, my lifelong bosom friend,
Was Kimon's public enemy. He sent
At once advising me to wait a while
Before returning home, till things were calm.
You see him now, at last, in full career,
Not on the side of high society,
But with and for the people. What a change
From how he was in boyhood! And you see
His breadth of vision in his readiness
To reassure his friend, though Kimon's too.
I tasted deeply of the bitterness
Of being banished, though without the shame,
And sweetened by the balm of faithful friends.

It was a time of weary idleness;
The first time I had known for many years —
Indeed since after Salamis — when I
Had been unoccupied, with not a task

That filled the bounds of consciousness. The works
Of the whole period preceding were,
With insignificant exceptions, finished.
My studio at home was empty. Life
Seemed suddenly to stop. Was I worked out?
Was my day done? From this time should I be
One of the discards of the world of art
Who are the more pathetic for the gift
Of early years that set a standard up
From which to measure down their impotence?
If my devoted friends had not been there
That helmless banishment might well have been
The death and burial of me as artist.
For in such deep-sea driftings of the soul,
Too far in isolation, or too long
Tossed and submerged, the breath of artistry
May gasp its last, and the indifferent tide
Fling up a lifeless carcass on the sands.

Myron made light of downcast questionings.
"Why, my dear fellow," said he, "it is time
You took a good vacation change at last.
You think you're down and out now, just because
Business is slacking. Take a look at me —
Not as a model but an object lesson,
How not to do, I grant —, my idle hours
Are best part of my work. What would you think
If every time I lay off I despaired
Of ever having anything to do

Again, or ever being up to it
If some poor fool should have the foolishness
To give to me, a fool, man's work to do?
The trouble is, you're so methodical
That when you've nothing to use method on
You think you're useless. Take an ounce of me
And mix it in with you. Lie by a while.
Refuse the next commission that comes in —
They'll come in fast enough — and say you think
You'll give up sculpture for the cobbler's last.
Then is the time to judge if you are done,
Or only just beginning your career."

His rough words gave me help, but I derived
More staying-power from Polygnotus' calm.
One day while sitting at his Cnidian Club
(The topmost corner of the temple close)
And looking out upon a world deployed,
He took my hand in his and said to me:
"You suffer thus because professional.
Throughout the series of your works till now
You have envisaged life as a career.
Your works, significant as they have been,
Are less than you, not greater. It is yours
To give expression to a larger thought,
A nobler message, than you yet have done.
Miltiades — the Lovely Lemnian —
Mere masterpieces of apprenticeship;
The fragrant fruiting of the vine, whose blood

Must ripen in the darkness and repose.
You have it in you to transcend these bounds.
For this you must be free — detach yourself.
As a professional you have despised —
Or say ignored — the aimless amateur;
But, after all, it is as amateur
That greatest works of art must be produced.
Expression being sole-sufficing end,
Beyond the shade of worldly interest.
You have completed your professional
Apprenticeship; you have attained the goal
Of independence in a worldly way;
Let that be symbol of your freedom too
Of spirit and of art. Rise one more rung
On your life ladder to be amateur." —

While Polygnotus painted at his club
Myron and I spent all our days afield,
Until our sandals knew the path so well
They brought us home themselves. Our greatest feat
Was climbing Mount Parnassus, which required
A jaunt of good three days, and camping-out. —
My blues had rather deepened than been cleansed,
In spite of my friends' help, as the weeks dragged,
For I was homesick, at the ebb of life.
Worst bane of all my banishment, I longed,
Oh, inexpressibly, for my beloved.
We had grown one through our long years of joy,

As man and woman from the first were planned
To grow together, but as few have grown;
And to be parted thus was agony,
As if our selves, long fused into one soul,
Were shredded back to two, now helpless each
Without the other one. A life like ours,
Of passion crowning love, and love itself
Resublimated to impassioned friendship,
Feels parting painfuller than passion does.
Thus our two hearts were pulling thirstily
And pumping life from life at farthest poles.
A letter from my loved one had referred
Vaguely to her own suffering, and this
Had added to my pain anxiety;
For she was wont to minimize herself
And I surmised more than she clearly said.
The thought, too, of our adolescent sons,
Those twin embodiments of her and me,
Caused father-hunger nothing could allay.
I ran the gamut of nostalgia
And in the mode of dirges, high to low. —
In the excursion to Parnassus' peak
Apollo's presence poured a new life-blood
Into my heart depleted and depressed,
And for the first time since my banishment
I felt up-borne upon a moving tide;
But not for very long. As we returned,
The old pain fell upon me like a pall,
More heavily as evening darkened down.

The sunset had been tragic — beautiful
In an uncanny, cruel, bleeding way,
As if exhausted legions of the air
Were battling hopelessly a baffling fate.
Now, all the carnage done, a sombre shroud
Was dragged out mournfully across the sky,
Through whose thick folds there gloomed a glassy sea,
Lividly lapsing to the empty west.
As we came down into the Theban road,
Near that ill-omened spot where Oedipus
His father Laius slew, a frightened hare
Fled past us with an owl upon his heels,
The first-awakened wings of sweeping night.
Something portended.
When we reached the stile
The dogs were silent, unlike Delphi dogs.
I heard the trickle, in the humid dusk,
Of Castaly, as I could not recall
Its gurgling — just as if it said a word,
Over and over, softly to itself.
What word? . . . I hearkened — could not make it out. —
I heard a call, a strange and eerie note,
From in the Precinct. — Everything was still.
The plane trees heaved a sigh as we passed in.
Crossed branches grided. It was like a hinge
That opened stealthily. A whirr of wings —
The twilight — and a hand that touched my own.

Myron was near me but it was not his.
Could it have been a leaf that fluttered past? —
The breeze died down, and sighed into the glen
Far, far beneath. A perfume, as of grass
New-mown, trailed with the breeze. A flame —
Dim — dim — down there above the troubled pool
Where shattered Pleistus showered in silver sighs
To slip in silence under olive boughs
Out to the sea.
I stood a moment, still.
Myron moved on and opened the house door.
Our host stood there with awe upon his face,
But eager to deliver what he knew,
Before the messenger who stood close by.
I recognized a slave of Pericles
Whom he was wont to send with messages
That needed all trustworthiness and speed.
I could not hear his words. I read his look.
I knew what he would say. — My love was dead. —

To Myron once again I owed my life.
He raised my drooping spirit to his breast
More like a father than a friend. From him
I learned once more to face what came. He knew
How to distract me, he and he alone,
From my bereavement; not by comforting,
Except by reason of his presence there,
But giving an incentive for new work,

Like, yet unlike, what I had done before.
He took the motive of my Delphi stay —
A votive offering at Phoebus' shrine—
And held it up before me, hour by hour,
Until within my soul another shape
Built itself up. I could not bear the thought
Of modeling again the female form.
I felt that I had said my final word
Of femininity. He now suggested
The male form, in which his best work was done.
Strange as it seems, I had not sculptured ever
A single figure of the virile type,
Excepting studies and Miltiades —
Part of a group, although the man himself
Stood out as if against a high relief.
Myron persuaded me to try my hand.

And my old friends were with him in the scheme.
Though I knew nothing of it at the time,
He wrote to all who, he conceived, might have,
Or might obtain, the giving-out of work;
With the result that in a little while
I had to open me a studio
Under Apollo's eye, and near the shrine.
It was a favoured place for sculptor's work,
For in those mountains flourishes a stock
That, for pure beauty, outdoes humankind
Anywhere else, I dare asseverate.

Pericles' friendship was the first to make
Ready response to Myron's call. At once
He sent to ask if I would execute,
In bronze, an armed Apollo to be placed
In the Acropolis, before the front
Of the new temple that he hoped to build.
He had thought thus to pave the way for me
To come back under favour of the god.
From Polycleitus' son, who then was building
The theatre at Epidaurus, came
An order for an Aesculapius,
In gold and ivory, for that resort.
And Myron's own connections came from Thebes
To strike a bargain, much to his disgust,
For a small Hermes, marble, by the door
To their Ismenian Apollo's house.

So almost overnight I found myself
Again the sculptor, with a fair array
Of works — bronze, marble, gold and ivory.
But at the best these things were uninspired;
I had no joy in them at all; hack work,
If anything of mine has ever been;
The heart all absent on its endless quest,
Imagination in abeyance. Warmth,
Which had informed my crudest earlier things,
Giving them beauty technic often lacked,
Was gone from these, whose skilfulness of handling
Surpassed the best ones when the heart was there.

I gave what I could give, but not my best,
Which was no longer mine; it had gone forth
Into a shadowed place with heart of love.
But no one noted how the best was gone
Out of my work; for even those tried friends,
Myron and Polygnotus, marked with joy
The cleanness of my technical attack,
And asked no more. I wondered at their praise;
Which was not blind praise, either, for they saw,
What I could not see then, that loss itself
Had freed and perfected a certain phase
Of my equipment, though the minor one.
Strong feeling often rudely interferes
With art whose end is to express the feeling,
So that one faces an obscurity
Of fumbling, where one looks for clear expression.
It is the rarest masterpiece that sees
Matter and manner flow in one smooth stream
To lift and bear one irresistibly
Out to the open sea of tidal thought.

In all that episode of Delphi work
The twofold phases of my life were torn
As into separate personalities,
Each, for the time, a being by itself,
Free-lance in the adventure of the soul.
While my cool hand was working to an end
Of technical perfection in itself,
My heart was groping for its own free way

To reconcilement and the broader view.
Without that pause and poise of all my powers
I never could have found enfranchisement
To enter on the field of later life
Ready to cope with it.
I do not like
To say too much of what I suffered then;
And it would be impossible indeed
To do it justice. Let my silence speak. —
I had, at first, no small anxiety
About my boys; until my mother urged
Indubitable claims to care for them.
Her heart had clothed itself with green of spring
Again, in spite of her autumnal years,
For those two images of Charmides.
She gathered them beneath her mighty wing
And mothered them as though they were her own
First-born — the first-fruits of her youthful love
Become the last-fruits of grandmotherhood.

Myron returned to Athens, promising
He would, for his part, keep a mannish eye
Over their breeding — he whose humble home
Was bursting with the harvest of his love,
Love that has kept home humble all his life.
Before we went to Delphi he had cast
That masterpiece of sculpture his bronze Cow,
Which now he had to place, upon the Pnyx.
You know how he has studied animals,

And sculptured them as if of human kind.
That first trip out to Corinth with the goat
Waked in him, he has told me, his clear view
And understanding of their kindredness.
He always loved a speechless, helpless thing —
A beast, a baby, anything brought to bar.
For my part I read FATHER in big print
Over the doorway to his character;
And it was good to have him with my boys
Both for his faithful interest in them,
And for his virileness of character.
Soon Polygnotus also said good-bye,
When, at his leisure, he had made complete
His mural decorations; leaving me,
Of all our circle, utterly alone.

You cannot think of me in solitude —
Me, who have run my course amid the whirl
Of Grecian life at its intensest, and,
Within that vital vortex, at the heart
Of the most sociable of friendly groups.
And such a solitude as Delphi offered
I never could have known in all life else.
There is no isolation so complete
As the sad heart endures in shifting crowds;
And I, for banishment and loss of love
Together, drank the cup to its last dregs.
Yet piercing as my anquish was I found
In it a comfort I could not have had

From friends too eager to console to veil
The call for consolation, nor in scenes
Too close inwoven with the life of love
To be unraveled from its conscious loss.
After that love life was forever past
I realized, as never until then,
The richness of my whole experience.
No more an integrated part of it,
I learned to love it in another way,
Seeing it from beyond and from above,
Withdrawn thus on my lonely mountain-side.
I had been placed too near to grasp the forms
Of intellectual and moral things
That crowded my environment, confusing,
Often obliterating, motives that,
In this new isolation, sprang up clear
And strong before me, with a quality
Of sculptural and formal massiveness,
In which the episodes I tell you of
Fell into place, assuming their true values
In masses moulded and coordinate.
Much that I tell you I could not have told
Intelligibly, but for that calm pause
At what seemed then the very end of things,
But what was rightly but the rallying
Of all my forces for the fateful plunge.

I had been independent all my life,
In some sense, relatively speaking; now

I gained a freedom that seemed absolute.
I came to poise, as Polygnotus did,
In cloudless aether gazing on the sun;
And to attain a true relationship
With powers beyond the human, yet akin.
What Polygnotus had from infancy
I had achieved through living my full life;
A long, slow process of development
That gathered increment at every turn,
Of human sympathy from my rich loves,
Of aspiration from my artistry,
Seeking forever to find God in man,
Forever man in God, to fix them kin.
As I had climbed the arduous ascent
From yearning childhood into conscious love,
So, through the years of full maturity,
I climbed the rugged pathway to the height
From which I looked on nature and on man
And on the vision of immortal gods,
And saw them poising in a balanced scheme
As perfect, in its unity and certainty,
As love itself, as life itself, those two
Manifestations of one primal whole.

My very nearness to the holy shrine,
The constant murmur of the Oracle
Beneath one's consciousness at Delphi, worked
Most powerfully on my spirit. Time
Flowed on and on in an untroubled stream

Until I lost all reckoning of it
And swam as in an ocean of the god.
Alone upon the threshold of his shrine
I spoke with him and was vouchsafed his word
Again and yet again. I found new strength
To venture out once more on life, where he,
The patron of all beauty, healing, light
Assured me footing in a wider field
The bounds of which were not to be defined.
I learned to put ambition to one side
And look upon my art as privilege,
Not perquisite; to stand outside myself
And use my gift as instrument of God,
For his ends, not my own, and for mankind,
Whose good he guarded. Oh, the ecstasy,
That breathing-in of godhead to the soul,
To wean it from its narrowness of self
And to enfranchise it to lofty ends!
Just as my father had befriended me,
So down upon me came an influence
Of searching sweetness, sympathy, and strength,
At every visit to the holy shrine.
I felt my father in that influence;
And yet again, as once long, long ago,
I was a child beneath its kindliness.

Little by little, I grew more at ease
And more assured in my new attitude.
I came to feel a oneness with the god

That not alone revealed divinity
But quickened my resolve to do his will
As an initiate in his mysteries.
Between him and myself a sympathy
Beyond all words established an intense
And mystic bond: Apollo son of Zeus,
Preparator of the all-father cult,
Shone as the sublimation of myself
The son of Charmides. I saw the face
Of him, my human father, clearer still
As Phoebus sent his beams into my heart,
Showing the way, his sweet and blessed way,
Among the mysteries of human things.
And up that path, so packed with images,
Out of my depths I climbed into his sky —
Half knowing, half surmising, wholly feeling,
His nearness and his vast beneficence.
And oh, the nearer that I drew to him
The clearer came the face of Charmides
From dark of memory to light of day,
Identifying Phoebus with his sire —
Zeus the omnipotent, all-kindly one,
To whom our human spirits might appeal
With certainty of his compassion. Love,
Unspeakable and omnipresent love,
Matured within me for the lord of all,
Who holds creation in his hand, and rules,
Not ruthless, but all-pitying, who knows
And sympathizes with our human passions

And makes allowance for our weaknesses,
Because himself our heavenly counterpart
And skyey essence of our humanness,
The overflowing fountain of our life. —

So summer went and fragrant vintage came,
And the crushed treasure of the olive-vats;
The paths from the far fields processioned all
With lightfoot asses laden with the yield;
The threshing-circles dusted with the corn,
Or swept for the autumnal celebrants
Of the old-fashioned, rough Priapic rites.
Already through the stubble tender blades
Awakened to the tickle of first rain,
And over the gray country-side a film
Of indeterminate, evasive green
Quickened from day to day. The plashy edge
Of the ephemeral new rills grew wan
With violets, and from the seamy cliffs
(Most unsuspected harbourage) came forth
The fragile crocus — golden, snowy, mauve.

The season roughened, and Parnassus' peaks
Became, with their new mantle, snowy breasts.
Then, of a sudden, all our valley seemed
Dipped in a rushing riot, overbrimmed
With blinding cloud-rack rolling from the sea;
And the sea's voice was loud among the crags,
Augmented by responses from deep woods,

Which slept in peace all summer, but which now
Raised their shrill voices with the ocean's own
From all the hidden hollows of the hills
In wakened welcome to the coming storm.

It had become my custom to go up,
Morning by sunny morning, to the shrine
To worship. I drew strength from it. Today
I lingered as I went, to sense the spell
Of awe that lay on the uplifted land.
The air, the sea, the mountains, and the sky
Seemed all commingled into unison,
An agitated unison, in which,
As though in anguish, travailed deity.
I stood beside the altar out in front,
From whose raised platform I could look abroad
And watch the cloud-stream swirl along the glen,
Smite the Phaedreiades, and whip up through
The narrow gorge of Castaly. First drops
From the disburdening drove me beneath
The gorgeous shelter of the portico.
Swiftly a silver veil descended sheer
And shut the temple in as with a wall.
So now I entered, with a deeper sense
Than ever yet of being housed with God,
Alone amid the skyey multitudes.

How long I stood there with my hands upraised
In the intensive silence of the rain

I cannot tell; I was aware of nothing
Except a presence calm and heavenly
That was vouchsafed me in the holy place.
I only know there gradually came
A deeper twilight, till the open door
No longer threw a gleam from the veiled east
Down the long nave; through the translucent roof
Day was diffused no longer. It was night.
But all the voices of eternity
United in the choral of the storm.
The scream of new-born torrents from the cliffs,
The murmur of the forests and the sea,
The wail of unpropitiated winds,
The rush of mighty wings, the pouring rain,
Were but the wild harmonics of deep moans
From subterranean channels . . .
Consciously
I had no sense of time, of place, of self;
I was entranced, my spirit drawn from forth
Its carnal dwelling-place and floating free —
Pure disembodied vision . . .
In the storm
I heard the voice of the eternal power
And looked upon his face — the face of Zeus,
Beaming paternal; for it was the face
Of my own father vivid in the gloom,
His features glorified with a sublime
Expression of supreme benignity . . .

Then from the darkness of the inner place
I heard the chanting of the Oracle:
"Not Aphrodite, that hath planted thee,
And not Apollo, that hath nurtured thee,
And not Athena, that hath ripened thee,
Shall garner; for to Zeus the Gatherer
Behoveth harvest and the use thereof.
Olympia is longing for her lord.
His house is empty. Let her lord be housed." . . .

The storm abated and the light returned.
I came out into cleansed and sparkling day.
New life was laughing like a welcoming bride.
I came out to it purged and sanctified.

PHEIDIAS

VII

OLYMPIA

PHEIDIAS

VII

OLYMPIA

Blessed katharsis! From that hour I felt
That I was groomed and harnessed for a run
Over a course cleared for the rest of life.
Those solitary introspective months
Were a transition and an interlude
Between the climbing of the early years
And the long level, only now attained,
The high plateau of life; mountains beyond —
For how may human beings ever reach
An altitude not overlooked by heights
All unattainable? — but keen with winds
Out of the azure spaces, free at length
From snags and catches of the brushy sprint
Up, trackless and horizonless. And when
A formal mission from Olympia
Waited upon me for their temple Zeus
I took their overtures as but my due,
Although they stipulated that the work
Should, for magnificence and stateliness,
Outshine all Hellas else. A year before,
I should have trembled at the thought of it;
Now I accepted as a thing of course;

Neither indifferent nor egotist,
But dedicated — sure of my own powers,
And sure of the god's sympathy and will. —

My first impression of Olympia
Was one of disappointment. You, no doubt,
Pantarkes, who were bred there, think it strange
Your pleasant valley should have that effect.
You must remember I came straight from Delphi
And all that wonderful experience.
And then, besides, to make it softer still,
It was an off year of Olympiads.
There surely could have been no greater contrast
Than that between Apollo's fastness home —
So grandiose, so awesome, so austere —
And Zeus' caressing land of soft abundance.
My first thought was, as I came down the pass
From rude, romantical Arcadia,
And saw the sunshine brimming with its gold
The shallow river-basin: "Here's a scene
For idylls, harvestings and pastorals,
Rather than for the cult of Zeus enthroned."
One's first impressions, by their activeness,
Are factors which determine later ones;
Reaction equaling, in feeling, action,
Creatively supplying what is lacked.
They say Egyptians, on their desert plains,
Heap up enormous pyramids of stone,
To quench the thirst that drifting sands arouse

For stable mountains. So Olympia
Stirred inspiration in me, at first sight,
To raise, in contrast to such gentleness,
A form, though not ungentle, yet almighty.

My very first care was to get a shop
As nearly reproducing temple size
And light-conditions as was possible;
A veritable rough facsimile
Of what would be the setting for my work;
The only difference of moment being
The roof, which was removable, so that
For comfortable work it was a court
Quite open to the sky or partly covered
To suit all needs. The most essential thing
Was, in my estimation, that the work
Should tell in study as it would erected;
But hardly less important was my will
To have the sculpture perfect in itself,
And worthy of the god, no matter if,
In the obscurity of temple gloom,
Its fineness were lost largely, its effect
In composition being most derived
From its great masses, not from its detail.
I deemed this character to be a part
Of the sincerity of the whole work —
The element of lavish sacrifice,
Of the too-much not being yet enough,
In this supremest gift to the Supreme.

Do you remember how the cheery place
Became a temple, when we roofed it in
And got the light from the east door alone?
And how the helpers tiptoed noiselessly,
And spoke in whispers, in the new-made gloom?
But when we let the light in, they revived
And made as if they had not taken note
How they were muted by the darkening!
Yet it is said that sculpture should be free
And independent of its lighting. True,
That sculpture must accept light as it comes,
And stand the test of the most searching trial;
But that means, merely, standards are so high
That sculpture is not sculpture till it can.
It is essentially a partnership
Between itself, its public, and the sun;
If but one partner fail, the firm goes broke;
And for the public's eye the light is crucial.
I finished Zeus so finely it can stand
Any illumination; but you know
I would not have it seen except in gloom.
It speaks a different language in the sun —
Says other things I will not have it say
Except in whispers to the ear attuned
To reach the eye through the imagination.
The worshiper must be immersed in gloom
To feel the sculpture overwhelmingly.
The need is hardly less to set the scene
Than to present the play.

I well recall
How you yourself, Pantarkes, bore this out,
And clearly showed that it is not alone
Associations of experience
Determine our effects, but instincts too,
Behind and under our experience.
In those days you were but a baby boy,
Forever out of hand and under foot;
A bother, though a captivating one,
Endured because you made, amid the work,
Such a delightful plaything. Whilst your mother
Posed for the maid in Zeus' outreaching palm,
You were your father's fun; when father posed
For the tremendous form of Zeus himself,
You were your mother's own delight-despair —
Quicksilver, spilt, not more elusory —
And sensitive as is a silken sail
To shift of feeling. You would cruise around
The cliff-walled, sun-swept ocean of the court,
Sheets full and banners flying, now and then
Dipping your pennant to the island god
With: "Pretty little mama! Great big papa!"
Acting both parts with an ecstatic glee;
But let the roof-screen be drawn partly on
And you would start at once to take in sail
And trim your course for port at mother's knee;
Then house the whole—not Aeolus himself
Might budge you seaward, so securely furled
In arm-locked haven, safe in mother's breast.

Once, and once only, you emerged to say,
With gravity that would become a priest:
"Lord Zeus loves Panty! Spanky jus' 'e same!"

The prettiest compliment I ever had!
But even chicks will cower at covered skies
Before they know a hawk. The artist deals
With inmost secrets of such influence;
And there is no more interesting thing
Than to try out and to investigate
The basic feelings in the human heart
One has to reckon with in artistry;
Feelings that all men have — the natural,
Original appeals of common things
Before associations train and warp us.
That is one reason I so value thoughts
From simple people and from little children:
They give a helpful clue unconsciously
To labyrinthine secrets of appeal.
You were my delicatest instrument,
And so responsive to my every test
I found you fascinating. Thus you see
How carefully I planned, grounding my work
On instincts primitive to eye and touch,
Because these things are universal, fixed,
And permanent, in the response evoked —
Appealed to now, appealed to through long time,
With promises of immortality.

For our time, though, association-values
Almost surpass the sense of sight and touch.
The Zeus, as I conceived him, was to be
Composed, on bases of instinctiveness,
Out of the richest treasures of mankind,
As they are stored in ancient poetry,
And as they are embodied in the life
Of racial aspiration, racial will.
It is not easy to incorporate
In single figures cumulative power
Of thoughts far-reaching and of varied tone,
As in a group like the Miltiades,
Where range of subject tempts to range of treatment.
In my conception all monotony
Must be avoided and expression gained
By building up its force with multitudes
Of finely wrought details, essentially
Pointing the complex whole, and giving scale
As well as splendour to its unity.

In this I but obeyed the deeper laws
That underly all art, though rarely coming
So clearly to the surface; yet there were
Many who saw it, while in making still,
Who much deplored the too great emphasis,
As they said, on detail and interest.
Menon especially, who came one year
To see the games while Zeus was going on,
Condemned, and made no bones of saying so,

Its cloying richness and its wastefulness:
"It is a scandal to see all this work
Upon a figure always to be seen
In gloom where you can never glimpse it. All
The great cult-statues are the crudest things —
Sometimes, as you well know, mere rough-hewn blocks;
And think how people worship. Stocks and stones
Are worth as much as sculpture in the dark."
Those were his words, though so incredible.
However, I proceeded with my work,
Content to think that he saw but the clay,
Where I was visioning an aureole.

For all those heavy earthen draperies
Would be transmuted into gleaming gold,
Wrought and embroidered with an interplay
Of lions and of lilies, symbolizing
Godhead become the creature, clothed with might,
And Earth, evolved to godlike purity.
From out that mystic mantle towered the torso
In naked amplitude of ivory,
Like a pure soul emerging from its clay.
Not less significant the attributes
Of rule and victory in the two hands —
The sceptre, scintillating with its gems,
The buoyant Nike poising from the wing.
They framed the figure with their verticals,
They told its story, and they threw its form

Far back, into a deeper mystery,
By their own brilliance.
And the lofty throne
On which the god has found sublime repose —
Its elements contribute something each
That makes for majesty and mystery:
Built up of ebony, from whose deep night
Emerge with starry gladness those two lamps,
Phoebus and Artemis, the seed of Zeus,
Their shafts impaling as with rays of dawn
The sons of doubting Niobe; above,
Sphinxes and Theban children interweave —
Mothers and sons of myth and mystery;
While all around, in contrast and support,
Realities, in shape of youths at play —
Among them you, Pantarkes, binding back
The wind-blown wantonings of golden locks;
And then, in low relief, the crowded troop
Of Heracles against the Amazons,
With Theseus foremost of the ranged allies;
Atop, the Graces and the Seasons, grouped
Behind, so as to crown their father's arms.
Under the feet of Zeus his footstool rests
On lions proud to play humility;
Upon the cushion, thick embroidery
Shows Theseus battling for Hippolyte —
Athens' first contest with a foreign foe.
And under every corner of the throne
A flight of Victories, with wings outstretched,

Seems to bear up the whole in heavenly space. —
All these are not mere decorative themes
But conjurers of psychic atmosphere.

The socle, too, that bears the burden up
Supports in thought as well as bodily;
But here the motives are of inlay work,
Golden reliefs mosaicking the stone
In a broad band of figures stiff upright
To add supportive sense to the design.
The central feature is a prancing team,
Front on, yoked to the car of Helios,
Rayed reinsman to the king and queen of heaven.
Far to the left there is a triple group
Of Aphrodite rising from the sea,
With Eros greeting, Peitho crowning her.
Balanced against this, over on the right,
Is Amphitrite in Poseidon's breast,
And the forgetful moon upon her steed
Plunging beneath the waves. Between these two
Extremes and the great central chariot —
Quadriga with the sun, Zeus, Hera — come,
In close procession, gods in couples ranged,
Bringing their quota to the feet of Zeus:
Thaleia and her partner — mirth and grief;
Hermes and Hestia — the road, the roof;
Phoebus and Artemis — the day and night;
Pallas and Heracles — wisdom and strength. —
I love to tell them over, one by one,

Feeling their fitness out as if again
I were to fabricate that plastic poem
And juxtapose the subtle harmonies,
Call forth their rich harmonics.
Some inclined
To wonder why the wall-like barrier
That kept the people off was left so plain,
Fronting the portal, while the other sides
Cried out with colour. It was thus because,
For those who entered from the glare outside,
The ocean-blue of that wide wall removed,
Threw back, both magnified and mystified,
The gleaming god behind it; like an isle
That lifts its templed hills beyond the sea,
Endeared by distance, fair for being far.
Panaenus' first thought was to bring the scheme
Of splendour to the floor, incorporate
The barrier with all it barred within,
And so to pyramid the whole effect.
But one swift sketchy trial satisfied
Both him and me that it would hurt the whole,
His own as well as my work. He withdrew,
Therefore, from that front field, and gained thereby
Preponderance of glory for the fields
Adjoining, where his masterpieces told
At closer quarters, with no rivalry.
But he too held to the essential theme
Of leading up to Zeus; with farther-off,
Less obviously intimate, support,

While yet not arbitrary, nor far-fetched.
I tell you all of this that you may see
How anxiously an artist takes his art,
And with a conscience that is care itself;
Else work falls down — or takes a second place,
Worse even than collapsing.
While all this
Was taking shape, you grew to be a lad
Under these eyes that were not opened yet
To how I loved you. Just an easy part
Of the day's work you seemed, a usefulness
More used for being easy. When the time
Arrived for you to start athletic work
That took you from my side, I first began
To feel your presence a necessity;
And I suppose I teased you sore with tasks
That seemed imprisonment. That day, at last,
When no one knew at all where you had gone —
Annihilation of my consciousness!
And the long days thereafter! — I learned how
My mother felt, the day I ran away
To Marathon. I was a mother too.
But when I found that you had gone to sea,
The loss was less a pang: it was not I
That drove you from me, but escape that called.
You were a seaman always in your play —
The salt was in your blood. I knew it now,
And loved you for your love of free adventure
In which you seemed embodied Hellenism,

Another type than mine of the pure Greek:
The seaman with the wind-song through his brain,
The landsman with the song-wind through his soul.

That loneliness brought home to painful thought
My boys in Athens, learning Athens' lore
Without their father's; and I sent for them,
No longer willing to go on without.
Not even Athens could quite compensate,
It seemed to me, for lack of fathering.
One grows both keener and much mellower,
As one gets older and ambition wanes,
In all one's human feelings. Passion passed,
A warmth as sweet, as deep, as urgent, even,
Usurps and permeates the core of man.

I was not old yet — very far from that;
But in that atmosphere of pristine youth
Which is Olympia's great heritage
One feels maturity a riper thing
Than elsewhere; and in those exciting days,
When both the temple, with its sculptured fronts,
And Zeus, to house in it, were under way,
I may have seemed a patriarch; for both
Paeonius and Alcamenes, at work
Upon the temple pediments, were young,
In their first independent artistry;
And Colotes, who was my chief of staff,
Was not much older, though a graver man.

Our shops were full of green apprentices,
Whose tuneful voices mingled with the din
Of marble-hammers and the metal-forge.
I missed your skylark flute-note over all;
The choir was low-pitched for your wanderings.
But still our song was blithe, what with the fields
Of training-quarters and the fragrant cult. —

Perhaps I gained, as to authority,
Not by my age, but by my colleagues' youth.
I needed it, you may be very sure,
To push to a successful end a work
So unexampled. Every element
Drew forth some comment of surprise or shock.
And at the end of each Olympiad,
After the guests had gone, I had to take,
Or parry, a whole arsenal of shafts,
The cumulative quiver of remark
The crowd had left behind to prick the minds
Of all the Altis syndics.
Most of all,
There were two difficulties that arose
At frequent intervals, and both of them
So radical, that to eliminate
Meant to destroy the labour from the start,
Begin again, or throw the thing away:
The seated pose and the colossal scale.
Menon was spokesman of the dissidents.
Such was the keenness of his subtlety

To scent escape from commonplace, and tree it,
That when he spoke he could be counted on
To point at climbing fancy.
"First of all,"
He said, "I cannot see Zeus sitting down.
Where will you find example so at ease?
Zeus is the active principle — alive,
Upstanding, with an air of dominance.
Seat him, and you will but emasculate."
(I could but wonder if Miltiades,
As I portrayed him in the Delphi group,
Might not have fixed his definition Zeus;
For I could recollect his long distrust
Of the too great activity in it.
I had to show how Zeus, personified
In the Miltiades, was my idea.)
"And then, besides, to set a giant up
So huge it can but make ridiculous
The box Jack jumps from! You might just as well
Stuff the cell full and lock the door on it;
There'll be no room left for the devotee."

These words of Menon's touched the very quick
Of my conception, and expressed, as well,
Inevitable thoughts of everyone;
For I was venturing untrodden paths,
Threatened by direst dangers; on the verge,
Forever skirting the thin, crumbly verge,

Of bathos. Nothing but supreme success
Could justify my headstrong hardihood;
And Menon's outcry was a warning call
To keep me back where still the height was sound.

The syndics listened with an ear to earth,
And where they heard shale rattle they came quick
In agonized expectance of a fall.
But they were men as good as was their bond;
They took my leadership when they took me,
And they stood by me manfully throughout.
They were good friends, and glad to take a risk
For friendship's sake, authority and age
Tipping the balance. Intimate appeal
Through three long years of working partnership
Easily stood the strain of sudden gusts
That came each fourth year from the whirlwind games,
With me on exhibition. But they were
Frankly entitled to my fullest views,
And squarely stood upon their rights. No man
Can hope to carry off a god alone
Without divulging how he plans to do it.

And so I went as deeply as I could
Into the feelings that had prompted me
In making Zeus, and why I felt so sure
Of the results, untested as they were,

And quite untestable till all was finished.
I tried to show how bulk and pose were one
Inseparable motive, to present
Resistless force, controlled and in repose.
Resistless — how might one say that, in small?
Repose — how get that wholly, standing up?
Control — how show that better, than enthroned?
Reserve of forces — infinite reserve —
That was the feeling I would give to all
Within its influence, beneath its glance.
The very understatement should compel
The void devout, so yearning to be filled,
To make extension to the universe
Of that curbed vigour — in repose, so sure.
If this presentment ever supersede,
For coming generations, ancient forms,
And fix its type upon the thought of God,
In their new concept men will have no sense
Of loss — they will have found finality;
The men of our time, on the other hand,
Are wont to kneel to Daedala, of shapes
Unshapely, which possess no majesty
Except through magic of the old tradition;
To them it gives a stimulating shock,
A vital shock, to see the god benign,
Magnificent, alluringly at home,
Instead of dour and distant, as of old.
And I relied on that arousing shock
No little, not for permanent effect,

But for immediate acceptancy,
By overriding prejudice with sheer
Surprise and gladness at the difference.
Of this effect some would not show at all
In the unfinished state, depending much
Upon the skill in treatment; one must grant
As an essential such a skill as mine
In judging, in advance, of the effects.
And here again my tests stood in good stead;
I was enabled roughly to try out
Upon my friends, in my own studio,
Some small part of the points thus in dispute.
I was convinced; the syndics were quite willing
To take my word, in the last subtleties,
For their express desire, far more convinced
By my conviction than by proof itself.

But more than all the other questions, one
Theme of contention was most strongly buttressed
With economics, by opposing thought,
And, thus upheld, the hardest to throw down:
The overwhelming bulk of the design.
And as its making marched from step to step
Of scale in modeling, from small to large,
By pointing up successively, the cry
Grew more insistent at each breathing-place
To halt, and to be satisfied at last
With what already was surpassingly
Impressive. And the struggle grew more stubborn,

Not less so, as the years went by, because
Gripped argument got clench proportionate
To each enlargement, till the final one.
The half-size fairly terrified the Board,
Already it so dwarfed the temple nave.
And that, precisely, was the danger point.
It would have been the easy thing to stop
At what already was so grandiose,
Without the further risk of spoiling all
By overdoing what the critics called
Already overdone. There is the crux!
I might agree half-size was overdone,
Yet be unsatisfied not to go on
Exaggerating, so as to ascend
To planes of pure emotional appeal,
Above the action of the critic sense,
In realms where feeling takes the place of thought.
In art, success will often justify
Doing with boldness what would be condemned
Done timidly. It was astonishing,
Even to me, who was convinced before,
To note how all the tiresome criticism
Died out when once Zeus leapt to final size.
It carried former critics off their feet.
And yet that crucial point of scale was won,
Against all protests from economy,
More by the psychological effect
Of pride in its uniqueness, than by art.
The point once won, though, art itself confirmed

The dangerous decision as the right.
The nervousness from the uncertainty
That half-size raised — of which did dominate,
The sculpture or the structure — was forgotten.
The sculpture, raised thus to extreme degree,
Assumed importance so beyond approach
That the nave rose again to noble scale
And made a setting most magnificent,
Most stately, for the super-state of Zeus.

But why all this insistence on such things
As, after all, are but somatic claims
To spirit valuation? Have I seemed
To say that Zeus can be explained by them?
Far from it! Though one put the finger down
On what is tangible, the soul escapes
All characterization; yet the soul
Is what informs the figure of the Zeus,
Removing it alike from precedent
And imitation; for its majesty
Comes not from any human reasonings,
And not from human skill in making it,
But from a power that was poured through me —
My hand, my mind, the soul within my clay —
By Zeus himself in his benignity.
The Zeus is no mere figure of the god,
Of gold and ivory and precious stones.
The everlasting in its form inheres.
It is to God-in-it we bow us down. —

When my young sons came on from Attica,
After their schooling, I was overwhelmed
By their resemblance to my father, and,
At the same time, through overlapping life,
To their own mother, my beloved one.
They were indeed the mixed embodiment
Of the two beings who had had most part
In my own nature and in building up
My whole conception of the universe.
The mould of the boys' heads was all my sire's —
His bronzy clusters brushed with golden bloom,
Her tawny tendrils turned to auburn grapes.
Most in expression and in character
They tantalized, yet satisfied, my heart.
At every instant I was asking which
Of those dear ones it was looked out at me
From his grave eyes so laughingly her own.
My faithful father-cult throughout my life
Had grown creatively significant,
Till in that vision at the Oracle
I gazed at the impassioned face of Zeus;
Now, when all forces of my being wrought
And travailed to the bringing of him forth,
There came the twin-born offspring of my love
To vivify the vision! Through those pangs
Of parturition, my dear sons were balm
To temper agony, and joy to send
Day-brightness through deep feeling, double bonds
That held high awe to human anchorage.

When I had gone into my secret place
Apart and lonely to commune with Zeus
And gain an accent of divinity
For the embodiment of very God,
I came again into their outstretched arms
More humbly human for their filial love,
Nearer divine for my own fatherhood.

Through all the time that you remained away,
Pantarkes, they took up the tasks you dropped,
Beginning at the base of artistry
With all the bothersome minutiae
That had so burdened you; but with delight,
And not distaste, at endless multitude
And at minuteness. They were truly born
To revel in mechanical device,
Administrative order, and the love
Of business method and exactitude.
What you most hated came as play to them.
Where did they get their quality of thrift —
The flying moment fed with ready hand?
It is not hard to see their mother there.
Hers too their utter faithfulness in love,
Their sense of duty, and their quietude.
They grew so much a part of all the work —
So intimate, so helpful, so devout —
That when the time came for farewells, I sought
The office for them in the sacred cult:
Custodians of the Image. Not content

With this, my friends the syndics granted it
In perpetuity and to their sons.
And thus I am, in them, for evermore
The guardian and acolyte of Zeus. —

That golden sojourn at Olympia!
It stands apart, for me, from all life else.
Never in my long years was I so throned
And courted by a rapt companionship
Enclosing me around like guardian walls.
In Argos and in Athens I was one
Among a world of fellows like myself;
All of my comrades — my opponents too —
On my own level and not I aloof.
At Delphi I was lonely and alone —
Far, far away in isolated grief,
A negligent and negligible waif
Amid the waters of humanity
Blind-groping for a helm and harbourage.
But there in reverent Olympia
I seemed almost to lead a life enshrined
And to partake the perquisite of Zeus
In sacrificial cult.
Those golden days!
Seldom is given to a man to taste
The sweets of recognition. To have done,
Or to have laboured at, creative work
Is, in itself, reward beyond desert,
To mortal workers, for immortal tasks,

In the habitual economy
Of things divine and human. Yet have I
Experienced that rarest apogee
Of human happiness. I thank Lord Zeus
For his vouchsafing the felicity
Of being tool to his creative will —
An instrument whose temper stood the test —
And for his giving more than due award
In Hellas' kindness. —
In my heart a voice
Warns me the Fates are jealous of my lot.
Life has been full, too full and too complete
Not to provoke their vengeance. But as yet
How cloudless is the blue! —
When I came down
From Phoebus' Oracle my heavy heart
Was yet an emptiness that would be filled.
And into it there poured a flood of love
For all men, but especially those friends
Who so much honoured and so much loved me.
For love is interactive, giving out
The measure it receives. My Zeus himself
Repaid my godward toil with manward power;
And I returned the love they gave to me —
Those faithful devotees at my own feet —
With feeling of a radiance whose warmth
Warmed me far more than those to whom I gave.
Love yearns for fruitage; and that love's ripe fruit
Was the surpassing majesty my Zeus

Was clothed with, far beyond, and far above,
The lofty beauty that I had conceived.
It was as though all love I ever knew
Had been combined and spiritualized
Into the moulding of my makerhood,
Where mother, father, brother, mate, and friend,
Made crucibled elixir of my toil.

When I arrived, my heart, washed clean with grief,
Was empty-ready for great love to fill;
And the new flood poured in and filled it full.
But love is mystery and paradox;
The more one has the more there still is room.
And you, Pantarkes, found a secret way
Into my breast as only nurslings can
Into such homes already occupied —
And I all unaware! When you had gone
My eyes were opened to the place you made
So beautiful within me (dimmed for me
Whilst you were by me), and I kept it pure
And sacred from the eyes of all the world.
And when, from time to time, some wind-blown word
Breathed from the far, inconstant seas, my heart
Rejoiced exceedingly, though moistened eyes
And aching throat belied its cheerfulness.
It was not merely absence made my pain,
But my waked knowledge how unknowingly
I had enshrined you, and that drear regret,
The haunting dream of the impossible.

It is not perfect love, achieved and known,
That, being lost, leaves the most poignant pain;
But love that, wounded and unrealized,
Is all uncrowned, whose stabbing might-have-been
Rankles the deepest, never knowing balm.
It was that cloud — that shade — that what-you-will —
That veil upon my feeling forth to you,
Which threw upon the bright divinity
Of my Olympic greatness earthly gloom
And made me human; human more and more
As service lifted me up to the height
Where, as his handman, I communed with Zeus,
His tiptoe Ganymede as you my own. —

The days drew on to dedication time.
My hours of leisure were more frequent, now
That all the fragments had been fabricated
And it remained but to assemble them.
I often, of a summer afternoon
During the training for the games to-come,
Took interest, as long ago I used
At Argos, in evaluating promise
In the competitors; and you would be
The subject of my thoughts, for I enjoyed
Recalling to my mind your supple form
And your delight in the athletic sports,
As you developed, and your promise too

Some day to shine as victor in them all.
I visioned you a youthful Heracles —
So like your mighty sire, so like the god
Whose mighty form he posed for; yet unlike
As the lithe sapling is unlike the oak
Whose brawn but broods within it. Dreaming thus,
I wandered once out from the stadium,
Up through the Altis, and within the shade
Of the wild-olive grove, and lay down there
Under the sacred Tree of the Fair Crown.
You know the spot, how well withdrawn it is —
Under the eye of Zeus and Ganymede,
Beside the Pelops Precinct. Muffled sounds
Of Altis life might penetrate thus far
Nor fray my dream-web: footsteps, talk and song;
The deep intoning of a priest in prayer
Before the Temple; cries, now near, now far,
Of victims grooming for the sacrifice;
The woodman piling his white-poplar logs
Beside the Altar; burnishing of bronze;
The brooklike murmur, in the Echo Porch,
Of poets, and their ripple of applause;
Sudden excited bursts of shouts, at times,
From the far stadium; the tinkle-tank
Of anvils where my metal-workers toiled. . . .
Then thin and clear above the drowsy hum
Of harmony and dissonance there soared
The Pythian air of flutes that signified

The leaping-match was on. Half gone in dreams,
I seemed to hear the flight of your own flute,
Pantarkes, into the remotest blue
Above the droning of the studio,
As once it used.
In opening my eyes
I more than half expected to see you
Right there before me. — But I was alone,
With that old haunting sense of might-have-been. —
From the dim grove I looked into the shine
As on a golden tapestry, beyond,
And traversed by, a tortured colonnade —
The blue-gray tree-trunks — silhouetting clear,
Picture by picture, all the glowing round.
The shadow of the Temple, close at hand,
Made of the grove a dusky-grottoed sea
Out of whose deeps a thousand sculptures isled,
Thronging pell-mell, as ages flung them there,
Yet clustering as if they were a crowd
Of living heroes grouping for the rites.
Beyond them was the Porch, whose gloom and gleam
Alternately revealed them and erased;
Till, as the eye ranged on, the yawning port
Into the Field closed the columnar ranks.
The Terrace of the Treasuries took up
The march of marvels — marshaled like a wall,
So close successive — packed against the Hill
Of Cronius, whose hoary-headed pines

Out-reached the Hera temple they out-aged.
And at the heart of the encircling themes
Stood the High Altar of Olympic Zeus,
The motivating feature of the whole. —
For all the softened sounds of distant life,
All seemed deserted, like the painted scene
Of some great drama ready to be staged.

I fell asleep, at length, and dreamed a dream
Of Iolaus and of Heracles,
How they were friends and lovers, man and boy,
Through many labours and vicissitudes
Faithful unto the end. Their spirits now
Walked hand in hand about their ancient haunts.
And once again, as in the olden time,
Young Iolaus, mounted in the car,
Drove his friend's team of mares to victory.
When, afterward, they came out from the games,
Mounted together in the chariot,
I dreamed that Heracles approached the hearth
That he himself had set apart to Zeus,
And sacrificed, and offered thanks to him.
And then he turned to raise his lover up,
But Iolaus was dissolved in air,
Leaving the Altar empty. One long cry
Grieved Heracles gave forth — and I awoke.

The crowd was coming up the steep incline
Out of the race-track vomitorium,

And the whole place was filled with life again.
The air was vibrant with the cry of flutes.
The naked athletes, many score of them,
Dark-bronzed, and burnished with the cleansing-oil,
Straggled in chatter — just a live relief
From off the Chest of Kypselus — against,
Or mingling with, the snowy-tunicked throng
Of shrine attendants, and the gaiety
Or sober brown of dancing or of toil;
For the day's work was done and all returned
Homeward from their rehearsals and their tasks
Of preparation. As I looked at them,
All moving outward to the Altis gate,
I saw one figure making head against
The flowing stream, a something strange in it —
A breath of salt from some far unknown sea —
And yet a something known and strangely near,
And so familiar that I caught my breath
In knowing you again. — How you had changed!
How you had stayed the same! Which one of those
Twin opposites surprised most, who can say?
All that I cared was, you were there again.

And the delightful time whilst you remained,
Filled, as it was, with your new Odyssey!
Those months that were foreshortened into hours—
Those hours, to flying moments in the sun!

That was the time you fully justified
These reminiscences with which I pay
Your swifter telling of a gayer tale.
I give again but what you gave to me,
A lover's heart where nothing may remain
Unopened to the lover.
Afterward,
When you had carried off the wrestler's crown,
And all hearts echoed mine in vocal pride,
It was from sense of fitness that I graved
Upon the finger of your father Zeus
Acknowledgment your due: "Pantarkes Fair,"
As who should say: "A Son unto the Sire."

How generously you enriched those days
Of my Olympic life by giving me
Your tales of all the lands beyond the seas
And all the peoples in them, you know well;
I need not now expatiate. Then too
There was the contribution of the guests
Who came from everywhere about the world
And waited on me while I laboured there,
To lavish tribute. There was not a chief
In all our Grecian universe but came
Sometime to witness games, and never one
But he was brought to me to do me grace;
Statesmen and tyrants, generals and kings,
Poets, philosophers, and artists, vied
With one another in civility.

But the most welcome of the visitors
Were all my faithful friends of early days,
Who came at intervals to see the games
And me together. Hardly summer passed
But there was someone of the old-time group
That I have told you of, and more beside;
Some who had always wanted to come out,
Let me decide them now, games or no games;
And others, having caught the fever once,
Caught it, or formed the habit, yet again.
Then, toward the finish, when my work was done,
Or nearly so, and the great day approached
For the unveiling, I grew very keen
To gather round me for a private view
The whole of my close circle; and they came,
Almost without exception, at my call. —

I felt a deep regret that Aeschylus
Was not of us, that ancientest of friends
Of me and of my father. He had come
To see me but a year before his death,
However; and had deeply touched my heart
By recognizing, and approving of,
My father's likeness in the head of Zeus.
His estimate I valued very high;
I knew the lofty freedom of his mind,
The fineness of his critical acumen.
His understanding had encouraged me
To push on fearlessly along my road. —

Both Tripods and Sextet were quite complete;
And so again we were a lot of boys,
Each with his tales of life and his adventures,
Each talking down the others, with no sense
Of interrupting them, and each as sure
Of others' interest as of his own —
Save Polygnotus, whose pure snowiness
And sweet aloofness set his soul apart.
He, at the rimy ridge-crest of his life,
You, our spring freshet, were the two extremes
That found a common half-way house in love.
There is no sweeter, more appealing, thing
Than the relationship between you two.
But your exclusiveness deprived the rest;
You suffered likewise, quite unwittingly,
Not to be with us on the day of days.

It was strange weather. All the valley swam
In vibrant haze of unreality.
The river, ever sparkling, lay inert,
A leaden streak through dusty stubble-fields.
The air was laden with the balm of pines
Whose lifeless clusters blurred with their dull dusk
The flaxen uplands. And the stifling heat,
Breathless and heavy! Even practice-hours
Were shortened, lest, in the oppressiveness,
The athletes overtrain. All day the sun,
Itself but lambence raylessly defined,
Waded and toiled through thick and torpid blue.

We all had gathered in the olive grove,
Where listless leaves betrayed the slightest breath
And tempted to pretend it was a breeze.
And there we loitered, talking, listening;
Life recapitulated, heart alone
Now left to open as the spirit moved.
And once again, as once long, long ago,
We wandered up together to the height,
But now the height of spirit, not of earth.
And, as of old, we talked of many things,
As thought on thought came ready to the tongue;
Yet all was of a pattern with the day,
Subdued though vibrant, with a mythic reach
As of the rites that search and stir the heart.
And as we lavished longest thought, of old,
On what most interests young men — on love —
So, now that love had been made known to us,
Each in his measure, each in his own way,
We talked of what most interests all men
Whom love has crowned and chastened — namely,
life:
Life and its implications, its surmise.
And all our hearts were softened and at one
In a warm sense of nearness to divine
And to mysterious things no man may know.

So softened, we arose, when the noon hour
Was sounded through the Altis, and approached
The entrance to the Temple, as the men

Came out from their long morning's work within.
We entered as their voices died away. —

I had been deeply touched, as all had been,
By our reunion after all the years,
And even more today by our full talk,
The intimate adjustment of our souls
To one another and to life itself
And to the god who ministers all life.
Whether it was our coming from the warmth
Into the cool, or some far deeper change
Within my soul, I know not, but I felt
A mystic influence that never yet
In all my labours had so touched me home.
The Zeus was mine no more, but a removed
And sentient being, raised to the divine.
Never so potent had the father been
In all my prescience of his majesty —
Never the majesty of fatherhood
So soul-compelling.
There was no word said,
But all were moved, down to our deepest depths,
And with a common feeling. —
All at once,
As by an impulse given to my soul
By an unearthly greatness, I moved on
Into the open space beyond my friends,
Feeling that I was going forth alone
Into a realm beyond my consciousness.

I lifted up my hands before God's face
And prayed within my heart a silent prayer:
If he were pleased with this my handiwork
He would vouchsafe me now a certain sign. —

He heard me, and a bolt from out the blue
Smote and destroyed the floor beneath my feet,
Leaving me scatheless. But the Sire was crowned
With a live aureole of golden flame.

PHEIDIAS

VIII

ATHENS YET AGAIN

PHEIDIAS

VIII

ATHENS YET AGAIN

Athens at last once more! From then, till now,
A life compressed into a dozen years —
A life most comprehensive! Pericles
Would hear of nothing but that I return
Hither forthwith to undertake the task
Of making the rebuilt Acropolis
One work of sculpture — concrete testimony
To the achieved supremacy of Athens.
Thus was conceived what well may prove to be
Most lasting of Greek monuments. The stuff
We moulded here is Athens' very self,
Of rooted rock, of marble, and of man;
Of all of these, but oh, so much, much more —
Of something other than we can define
(I nothing but the willing instrument),
Of forces more than man's: beyond; above.

In setting hand to the compelling work
I felt myself almost outside of life.
I had completely rounded my career.
Nothing there seemed to do, after the Zeus,

That would not be down-stepping. And besides —
Partly because I was a lonely man
(My mate no longer there, and my two sons
Already grown and placed in their life-work)
And partly on account of my long reign
Throned in Olympia, and my command
Thenceforth of all that wealth could offer me —
I felt detached; outside, if not withdrawn from,
The strife of studios. If I should yet
Find opportunity and inspiration
I felt it must be that of amateur,
As Polygnotus urged, without the sense
Of a responsibility at all,
Except to vision — implications none
Of pleasing or of gaining a success.

How little I foresaw this fallow field
That Pericles' audacity disclosed!
The thought of it aroused my deepest soul.
Here was a task exacting all I had
Of force and inspiration; sculpture — yes,
But not, primarily, in the strict sense
Of sculpture such as figured in the Zeus.
Here it was question of far vaster things,
In which remoulding the resistful rock
Of the old town, and building up on it
A group of temples, architectural
And sculptural at once, was secondary,
When all is said, to the man-modeling

Organization is. Here was indeed
Apotheosis of the plastic art,
In which the whole of the community
Was to be used as merely sculptor's tools,
And where the subject was: Imperium.

I was most fortunate in having had
A more than ordinary chance to see
The ins and outs of organizing work.
Ageladas was master in that way,
Establishing an almost world-wide fame
On meagre personality, spread thin
Over the score of chisels to his hand,
With me among the number. Then again,
The Painted Portico exemplified
The pros and contras of collaboration;
Micon, Panaenus, Polygnotus, I,
Inextricably cross-tracked for a while;
Till Polygnotus finally got up,
And kept us all to team work with taut rein.
While at Olympia, I kept an eye
On the relations of the architect,
Libon, who built the temple, with his aids,
Paeonius and Alcamenes, the sculptors;
And much admired the way the architect
Succeeded in attaining unity,
In spite of what seemed some recalcitrance.
And for my Zeus I held in hand, myself,
A brace of masons, smiths and carpenters,

Mechanics, cutters, founders, modelers,
Workers in gold, workers in ivory —
A goodly string of pullers, and hard mouthed.
Thus I was well prepared for the new work,
And all the more for having helpers ready
With whom to start my new establishment.

In the Olympic work I had relied
Greatly on Colotes, the most astute,
Most sound, coadjutor that I have known;
A man of men, who, when day's work was done,
Took off his clothes and was a boy once more
In all the workers' sports, the captain there
As in the work, no less adored by them
As friend and comrade than he was obeyed
Implicitly as their brusque overseer.
To me he was most loyally devoted,
In a relation almost that of son
To whom my slightest wish was like a law,
Though he had will of sinew of his own;
A man with genius for the rôle of friend,
Of understander, of executive;
And a good sculptor, thoroughly well trained.
In my new dispensation I fixed first
On Colotes, and brought him back with me,
To be my alter-ego manager.

And I brought back Alcamenes as well.
He would have come back home himself, no doubt,

But I invited him to come with me;
I had observed him in his temple work
And been most pleasantly impressed by him.
Unlike Paeonius, he seemed to take
To harness easily, was always quick
To answer to the architect's desire
To pull the work together, in despite
Of personal ambition to out-shine.
Paeonius, although as great a man,
Found it much harder to subordinate
His own end to the more important one
Of the whole temple; and his dry attack,
His archaistic, cold rigidity,
Were traits of character as of his art.
I should have valued his assistance too,
Nevertheless, for some outstanding place,
If he had not already started work
On his winged Nike, which has proved so great.

As for Alcamenes, I felt in him
A rich imaginative suppleness
And openness of mind that marked him out
Later for rare distinction and at once
For special recognition on our team.
His western gable at Olympia
Is, I think, less successful, on the whole,
Than the reverse one by Paeonius;
But it is freer and more daring, far,
And full of promise of the sort of thing

I most desired for the Acropolis —
Namely, a flowing unaccentedness.
You feel the same delicious suavity,
Ripened to mellow richness of appeal,
In all his late work, like his Aphrodite —
A pristine purity and tender warmth
United in a rare degree and way.
I compliment myself when I assert
His style is very friendly to my own,
Sometimes all but unrecognizably
Other than mine — a priceless influence
Among the sculptors when I am not by,
Priceless support in councils of the works.

I needed one more man of calibre
To make a trio of my deputies;
A social mingler, delegate and plume.
I owe the choice of him to Colotes,
One of his friends and fellow-islanders,
Young Agoracritus the Parian.
A youth most gently born, most gently bred,
Discriminating Fates upon his head
Had sifted blessings from Pandora's box
Without the banes, a living paradox.
You see how I am waxing lyrical,
Singing his praises. That is the effect
He had, and has in fact, upon the world —
He is a harmonizer. Stumbling-blocks
Vanish in thin air at his merest glance;

Bound wheels run smoothly for his lubricance.
Again! Forgive me. But I have for him
A very special tenderness of feeling,
Which twangs my very heart-strings for the rôle
That he has played in this great work of mine,
By way of cheer, and sympathy, and ease
From shoulder-burdens, hard for me to bear,
That he has taken lightly on himself
With eager evenness of temper always.
My heart went out to him on that first day
When Colotes and I went to his house,
Without his knowing what we had in view,
And found him busy with his modeling
Of Aphrodite — his prime favourite,
As he announced, of all the heavenly throng.
"And yet," he said, "I have a deep desire
Somehow to make her one with Nemesis,
Whom I most dread. It is a double sense
I wish to render as a mystery —
The awful, mingling with the beautiful."
This, from a youth just finding himself out,
Joined with the fact that he had clutched success
In his fine mystic figure, stirred me deep.
Add his frank presence, and the easy poise
With which he met me — neither up nor down —
And you guess my decision, on the spot.
I took him home with me almost at once,
And we have lived together, closest friends,
From then till now. He has his studio

Under my roof, and does his private work
Under my eye; at times eked out somewhat
With my own touch, in friendly helpfulness.
Common admirers even make pretence
That he has signed my statues and I his.
Do not believe it. Agoracritus
Is one of the originals. Indeed
He will go far upon his own account.
But in this work of the Acropolis
His rôle has rather been the harmonist,
My social secretary, and my friend
And confidential representative,
Than sculptor pure and simple, though his hand
Has had its share of honour in it too.

Besides this close-home triad, I required,
Throughout the work, the technical support
Of architects — an artist in control,
A practical constructor for the works.
And here again I was most fortunate
To pitch immediately on two men
Than whom all Hellas has no better stuff.
Ictinus and Callicrates indeed
Might well have been the chiefs, instead of me.
But Pericles and Fate had made the choice;
So they accepted with a better grace
Than might have been expected, though at first
I found them sticklers for authority,
And half inclined to carry shoulder-chips.

But that was only natural. They soon
Proved most efficient and most loyal aids;
And more than aids — true second principals.
I had discovered that was their real rank;
For, in the last analysis, their skill
In my art far surpassed my skill in theirs;
And I perceived a slight anomaly
In my commanding, in the fullest sense,
Artists as masterly as I myself
And, in their art, my betters. Here my years,
As at Olympia, proved ready ground
On which to base my headship. They both bowed
With grace and dignity upon that ground,
And work went well as a collaboration,
I in the chair, that might have come to grief
As strict organization under me.

Of the two men, Ictinus is the one.
Callicrates has less initiative,
Because of less imaginative gift;
But, given a good plan, a prow of bronze
To push things through, and capture full success;
Hard-headed and hard-sinewed, hard to move;
His valued talent is his staying-power —
He is a rock on which to build at ease,
Without anxiety, once he is placed.

Ictinus is a very special sort —
A kind of summing-up of architects

Into a clear exemplar of the type,
And therefore rather hard to meet, except
On his own premises; a paradox:
Tradition and imagination, mixed
And modified into a firm, smooth mind
In which the opposites are so at one
You might think they could never be, apart.
Advancing by infinitesimals
Beyond approved example, he reveals,
As though they blossomed, all the hidden hopes
That slept as rudiments in older work
Till he awoke them. And he gets results
That are correct, and unassailable
By formal critic hierarchs, yet free
And easy as a careless word-of-mouth.
Nothing is revolutionary there,
Yet everything he touches is so fresh
And vigorous, you draw a breath of spring.
Such is the Parthenon, you will agree.
But put your finger on particulars
In which it differs from the everyday
Of Doric temples — you are at a loss.
I had not known an architect before,
Intimately; for Libon kept himself,
Down at Olympia, aloof, alone,
A lofty arbiter of destinies
To underworkers, even sculptors too.
Ictinus was the first to introduce me
Into a world I looked on as a fixed

And arbitrary realm of rules and forms,
Only to find it plastic in his hands.

But what surprised and pleased me most, I think,
Was his good-nature and great friendliness.
Ictinus was best fellow of them all.
And that is not the least part of his strength;
Both harder to resist his fixedness,
And easier to yield with a good grace.
And, truth to tell, I often have to yield
To his elastic adamant of will.
I have controlled him, though, upon the whole;
The Parthenon is mine as much as his.
We get along together perfectly;
And I respect Ictinus as I do
The conscience in myself that holds my hand
To its ideal, difficult and dear.
Respect, however, hardly is the word
To finish with; for I revere him too,
And hold my own against him as against
A great heroical antagonist.
I conquer from him only proven bests;
I yield but seconds; and the thing we two
Combine to make will stand four-square to time,
Invulnerable, I make bold to say —
And modestly, with him the architect.

One other of the dramatis personae
I must present, and that is Mnesicles,
Who makes a triad of the architects.

As junior member he had less to do
Upon the temple; but his turn will come.
The Propylaea are his monument,
But now beginning. And I advocate
His taking up the Erechtheum too;
That will be later. He has genius, pure,
Joined with an easy and propulsive power
That thrusts him quite outside of categories;
Something like you, Pantarkes, let me say —
All for adventure as an architect.
And you will like each other thoroughly.
He is, at present, an unbroken colt
That needs the curb a little — not too much,
For his free gift is precious.
There you have
Two triple groups, whose complemental gifts,
And, you might add, inherent jealousy,
Consolidate and mould them into one.
So marked is each one's personality
The wonder is that they have stuck, except
That there is glue in group affairs like this,
Which holds the parts together, strong and whole:
The spirit of a living organism
In which each organ works with all the rest
On the condition that each hold its own.
Of that there is no question hereabouts,
For all have proved of sterling quality,
And each essential, recognized as such
By everyone.

And thus was organized
The living nucleus of our world-wide
Ramification of activities.
For here we had not only all the crafts
I managed at Olympia, but more —
All arts included in the architect's,
Besides command of vessels on the sea,
Lone desert caravans, and pioneers
Searching the world-ends for materials:
Marble from Mount Pentelicus, pure snow
Out of the quarry from which, as a child,
I had evoked heroic forms in dreams
That now are realized at last; fine gold
From Thasos, which has always been, to me,
Symbol of Polygnotus and his art;
Black ebony that blacker foresters
Had sweltered adzing from dank tropic swamps;
Smooth, tawny-tarnished tusks of elephants,
Fabulous quarry from the jungled hills
Beyond the Indus; from ancestral Crete,
Timbers as lasting as her ancient youth;
Copper from Cyprus, Aphrodite-stuff;
And, from those dim and seaward-looking isles
Far north outside the Gates of Heracles,
Silvery ingots of the virile tin,
Which being husband to soft copper gets
Impenetrable bronze. All of these tasks,
And others no less varied in their scope,
Were ours as Board of the Acropolis.

You had your part to play upon the seas,
And in the foreign marts where mariners
Touch the extremes of credibility
And overpass them, whilst we home-bound folk
Appropriate your mystic merchandise,
Forgetting half its magic.
As the work
Progressed beyond the utter crudity
Of block foundations, filling, leveling
With scattered fragments of the town in ruins,
Out of the chaos slowly there emerged
Our thing of beauty, offering the chance
To bring-in others of our sculptors here
For individual, noteworthy parts.
Myron and Menon were my first concern.

Myron declined at once —to my regret,
For I was sure he was in need of work;
But I could not persuade him. Friendliness
And pride, as near as I could make it out,
Played about equal parts in his response.
Marsyas and Athena, his last work,
Had left him stranded, costing him as much
As he got for it, counting in the cost
Of his big family while it progressed.
I should have valued something of his spirit
For certain passages, though he was right
Insisting he was wholly out of tune
With my reposeful style, in his abandon.

And knowing Myron I knew well enough
That he would rather starve than strive with me.
A place beneath me would be most distasteful.
And so he set his teeth and boiled his pot
By beautifully damascening cups.
I had the satisfaction to take on,
Nevertheless, his young son Lykius,
Who has no little of his father's gift
Of life in action, like Discobolus;
I pointed out his metopes to you.
And Myron constantly was by my side,
Much more than making up by his advice
For his defection.
Menon took the task
Neither with pleasure nor with squeamishness,
As duly plotted part of the day's work.
It was the first time we had been engaged
Thus at close quarters since our boyhood days
Under old Hegias, and I was struck
By his adherence to old-fashioned ways
Of handling work. He took a special pride
In his belonging to the older school.
I overheard him talk with Lykius
Sometimes as I passed by upon my rounds
(They worked there side by side on metopes
I destined to adjoin); you would have thought
There was superiority in old
Methods of working, for their being old,
Over the newer ones that we were using.

But he had no effect on Lykius,
And I was well content to see the work
Of one so neutralize the other's — each
Enough off feeling to attract the eye
If placed alone amid the stricter file,
But offering the fillip of surprise,
Contrasted thus, that gives a piquancy
To sequence without interrupting it.
I had the feeling, though, that Menon felt
Out of his element. No doubt he did.
Placed as he was, I should have, I am sure.
But there was nothing left but to go on —
Enough, alone, to turn the edge of joy.

The metopes, of course, were separate
And individual, as works of art,
On which I could keep busy many hands
And many minds as far apart as were
Menon's and Lykius'; but for the frieze
I was more exigent of unity
Of feeling, handling, composition, tone,
Although demanding great variety
Of interest and texture. In the frieze
You have a genuine collaboration.
Unlike the metopes — whose schemes were blocked
Each by its author independently,
Then pulled together where they needed it —
I made the first rough sketches for the whole
Of the Panathenaic frieze, and worked

Throughout upon it with the other men,
Flatting, or else accenting, touching up,
As seemed most needful. Agoracritus
Had most to do in executing it
With continuity of interest,
With Lykius the second in command,
For he was fine in such familiar work
As plays a part in many of the scenes —
Where one steed snatches for a fly, you know,
Or where a youth gets down to tie his shoe.
But Agoracritus poured out his soul
In that procession, he and I, as one,
Working to its perfection. I told him,
As I told you, about my childhood climbs
Up the old door-post bay tree, to the crotch
From which, through jealous leafage, I could see,
Making its progress from the market place,
Athena's proud procession, which became
Essential part of me; I showed him how
All of my loves — for father, and for mate,
For Hellas, for Athena — were inwoven
With one another, in impassioned dreams.
Processions, long-since bred into my being,
Were now developed to a racial soul
Moving in swift succession, from its birth,
Through preparation, and through sacrifice,
Up through all life to the immortal gods,
Upon their knees laying its loyalty.
The hidden thought beneath the outward form —

The dual unity of theme — appealed
To one whose thought of Love and Nemesis
Inspired his hand with sacred mysteries.

Both pediments are by Alcamenes,
In greatest measure. His Olympic work,
For all of its obscurity, was big
With visioned meaning, and determined me
To take advantage, to the very full,
Of his imagination — give it play,
Unhampered by my hand upon its wing;
Reserving for myself to clarify,
And to coordinate, and, here and there,
To do a figure or a special group
As were I his assistant, giving key
And character to treatment of the whole.
In this way I was able to endue
The Aphrodite, posed in Peitho's arms,
With my beloved's likeness, placing her
Among immortals where her beauty finds
Its most befitting home in memory;
So that her gentleness of spirit flows,
Like fragrance from life's summer fields, throughout. —
The Birth of Wisdom — no more pointed text
Could we have sculptured over Pallas' door;
Wisdom enkindled by Love's cleansing fire —
Is there more telling treatment? And again,
Athens, and all of Hellas, as one voice,

Speak from opposing gables. Valour, wed
With loving Wisdom in Athena's soul,
Has come to birth upon the sunrise front;
While to the sunset, to the open sea,
Looks out her contest with the Sea himself,
With lord Poseidon. — Through these formal themes
I hear, beyond, in deep reverberance —
Interpretable by the ear of love,
And love of intimatest lore alone —
The sough of soul-song sweeping through Greek hearts,
The song of sea-wind throbbing in Greek souls;
All mystically unified in Zeus
Who thrones aloft above the eastern door.

The door of dawn! It is within that cell
The Virgin is enshrined, the yet untouched,
Aspiring, and courageous intellect.
I shall not now describe her. Presently
The veil will be withdrawn, and you may see,
With your own eyes, chryselephantine Awe.
But I have wished your first rapt view to grow
From out a garden soul-soil first prepared
By my affectionate long recollections.
Her form is born of nothing less than these,
Gathered, coordinated, edified
Into that ever-living Memory
Whom Aeschylus revealed, so long ago,

As Wisdom's mystic mother, whose first roof
Rebel Prometheus reared, to shelter there
The hearth of human hope. That look of hope —
That crystalline, far-gazing awe of hope —
Is in her eyes; they glimpse, beyond the veil,
A vision of the beauty that awaits.
And with that vision she is clothed all down;
So far, so sweet, a certain wistfulness
Veils her proud poise and humanizes her,
Though so withdrawn, and oh, so lifted up.
All that my soul conceives in recognition
Of loving kindness, joy, and faithfulness,
Of looking forward with courageous heart,
Is realized in her fair form. . . .

STRANGE — strange —
That this embodiment of purity,
Wherein my finest feelings come to bloom,
Should have become, of all my works, the one
For calumny to single out and smirch. —
The minatory whisper of the Fates,
Who loathe a human triumph! — So it was. —

I never learned the deep and covered spring
Of the conspiracy that led to it;
I never sought, I never cared to know;
And, truth to tell, it never ruffled me,
In one sense — of anxiety lest light
Upon my conduct of the work might show

Anything not above-board. But it was
A sore humiliation to be haled
Before the court, to answer if the gold
That had been meted out to me had gone
Without a diminution to the work.
Throughout my life I had been working thus
With gold and ivory and precious stones,
Without suspicion, and with fitting fees
That measured my responsibility
And, had I coveted, must have removed
Temptation. And to be marked out at last
And charged not even with a virile crime
But despicable peculation — Faugh!
But even more, of course, than it hurt me
For my own sake, it hurt for Pericles',
And, by its hurting him, menaced the work.
Perhaps indeed the blow was aimed at him
Rather than me. We never rightly knew.
But politics had much to do with it,
As with most things at Athens.
Fickle town!
You can imagine how it relished me,
Thrown as a titbit to it. I learned then
The loathsomeness of spite from poison tongues,
The sting of pointed laughter following. —
But count that to the good. He has not lived
A full and rounded life, who has not faced
And lived through calumny; it is a sauce
Whose bite brings out life's savour.

It was well,
And by a sort of prescience, that I had,
For the first time in all my undertakings,
Made every plate of gold removable;
So that, in case of siege or of attack,
All could be rescued, or, as now, weighed out.
I acted on a hint from Pericles,
Whose mind is a most wonderful machine,
Involving opposites — integrity,
With canny scheming (to allay distrust)
That fits embezzlement. A long career
Of feeling out the fullnesses and hollows
Of popular impression, to come on
Or to withdraw, as needed, for success,
Has made him perfect master of the art
Of popularity, as the best means
To serve the people. Foresight, in our case,
Proved of great value.
It was Menon's flint
That touched the tinder off. As usual,
He had to have his say — without a thought,
At first, I am quite willing to believe,
That tinder lay there ready for a spark.
Just as he had been shocked to see the Zeus
Detailed and wrought but to be lost in gloom,
And almost in the selfsame words, he railed
At this Athena: "It is scandalous
To use for sculpture solid plates of gold,
When gilded bronze would answer just as well;

And more especially in days like these,
When half the League is clamouring against
The use of League-wide treasure to begaud
The poll of Athens. I'm Athenian,
And well approve the plan to push the town;
But we should gain more popularity
By hoarding than by throwing gold away.
I know of men, from Cyprus some of them,
Who claim flat-footedly that they'll secede
If any more of island tribute's put
Into such works as these, thus needlessly.
And who's to say, in such a vast amount,
Whether some secret gold-dust has not slipped
Into a pocket where it do'n't belong?
You can't trust everybody's honesty."

There was a faction by, that nursed the spark,
And soon blew up a flare of smoky flame,
A stench in all men's nostrils. Pericles —
Seeing the danger of an issue blurred
By a slow smudge, which faction most desired
To dampen under, that it reek the more —
Demanded an immediate inquiry.
And Menon was put forward by his friends
(Or those he went with, mostly from the isles)
To take accusing-witness prominence
Greater, perhaps, than he had counted on.
He had the choice (think you?) of backing out,
Or taking up the pose of mere desire

To have the truth known. You can not back out,
However, if all roads behind are packed
With eager pushers-forward. So he found.
He made a virtue of necessity,
If I can guess, in coming boldly out
To testify. He merely asked the grace
Of being not considered partisan;
As an old friend of mine he much preferred
Not to be mixed with the affair at all;
But public weal was surely paramount.
If there was nothing wrong, the facts would show,
And no harm done. And if there were a fault
On someone's part, why, Pheidias himself
Would be the first to thank him that the facts
Be published, so that all might be cleared up.

As one who had free entrance to the yard
And knew the worker-list from end to end,
Menon came forward for the one star part
He ever took. You cannot grudge him it.
That centralized and stimulating stare,
The perquisite of fame, was his a while;
And he began to like, at last, the rôle
That, in the first place, had been thrust on him.
Then, as our task works back on all of us
And permeates us with its character,
So Menon's function in affairs of state
Worked back on him, until he was assured,
I have not any doubt, of his vocation.

He had a duty, not agreeable,
But necessary; and he took it up,
After some vacillation, with a will.
It was his business to discover guilt.
His own fair standing was involved.
By this,
The wheels of formal justice were a-whirl,
And no retraction and no lukewarmness
Was now admissible for my old friend,
On pain of being caught between the cogs —
Suspicion that he might have been bought off.
So Fate decrees the logic of events,
Each leading on, inevitably on,
Into a sequence not to be withstood.

It was not difficult to find a few
Among the many on the teeming work
Who were suspicious, or who nursed ill will
Against some fellow — or against myself—
And who were ready to give damaging,
If not condemnatory, evidence.
Accusers naturally are the first
To open up their witness-reservoirs,
Before defence has opportunity
To dam the flow and halt it with the facts.
By that time half the land is deep in mud
From loosed suspicion — mud that sticks when thrown
And that is hard to wade through, later on.

The climax came at length when Pericles,
Who was himself a witness on our side
As to exact amounts that had been sent,
Quite took the court aback by testifying
All gold could be dismounted, with no hurt
To the completed statue — which, till then,
Had not been published, if it had been known
To our opponents. The next step, of course,
Was the official weighing of the gold,
And the full-authorized certificate
Of undiminished measure. —
Well, to me,
The worst of it is Menon's bearing since.
His attitude is hard to understand.
He bears a grudge against me just as if
I gave offence by being free from guilt.
But after all, to prove a charge is false
Does cast a shade on those presenting it;
And the true tragedy is his, not mine.
His life has been a failure, broadly speaking,
Not in this case alone, but otherwise:
His metopes — his best work — ridiculed
Because old-fashioned seen beside the new;
Most of his oldest friendships alienated;
And as to love, no satisfying fruit.
I never was admitted to his heart
Outspokenly, but I have much surmised
Of his unhappiness. He keeps his front,
So far as outward fair appearance goes;

But underneath he is a hearthless soul.
I had a chance, as you well know, to see
How, many years ago, he fell in love
With one who would have none of him, of course.
His feeling must have been a genuine
And lasting passion. Long he entertained
That solitary vision of what love
Might be, of what it could not but create,
Within the hearts that underwent its warmth.
He could not keep away, singed, tantalized,
By the sweet flame that yet was searing him
Until his bosom was a burnt-out core.
A more aggressive man, less sensuous,
Might have had some success in putting by
A hopeless passion and gone on without,
Or found some comfort in a lesser love.
Menon's voluptuous and indolent
Diathesis stood him in less good stead.
He turned, disheartened, from the genuine
But unattainable, to counterfeit
But ready to the hand — the deadly-dull
Assuagement of the tinsel meretrix.
Well, in a measure, I have been, myself —
Wholly without intent, and to my pain —
Closely identified with his defeat,
Though not, of course, the cause of it at all.
But let us now forget him. —
From the day
When we received our clean new bill of health —

A paper harvest — we began to reap
An aftermath of wildings from the mire
I have already mentioned; sticky stuff
And stiff to stir in, but a fertile soil
For faction's broadcast sowings.
Pericles
Had for a long time, led a private life
Of half recluse-like quietness. But when,
After my years of sojourning abroad,
I came back home to Athens, rich and known,
I did delight in living lavishly,
And entertaining. Pericles was first
And foremost of my intimates, of course —
He always had been, and there was no change
Except perhaps an increase in our love,
If that were possible. He comes to me
And brings Aspasia with him, but will go
To almost no-one else. You know my home,
And how my mother reigns here as a lady
Unique in all of Athens. She it is —
What with her years and her enfranchisement —
That makes it possible for me to lead
The sort of life I like to — Doric, say,
And practically Spartan in its free
And easy intermingling; on a plane,
Though, not of Spartan but Athenian
Sumptuousness and taste. There gathers thus
A marvelously fine and varied group
Of interesting people — poets, wits,

Philosophers, and statesmen, foreigners
Whom I have known abroad who visit here,
Artists of all sorts; many women too,
Who make exception for my mother's sake
Of strait-laced fashion. Underneath my roof
As nowhere else in Athens — or in Greece —
All types of free society assemble.
Well,
You pay the price for anything you get.
The frank and open freedom of our life
Has seemed incredible to some, except
Upon the theory of license here.
Women in free society! They think
I keep a bawdy house, it seems, from tales
The opposition whisper.
Pericles
Suffers the most of all, quite naturally —
Bigger the bull's-eye, easier the shot —
For he has had a difficult career,
In all that touches love.
He took to wife,
According to his family's desire,
A wealthy widow of his distant kin,
No love between them. Family respect
Began by being all-sufficiently
The basis of the union. But in time
Indifference grew to loathly weariness
Between two beings through whose veins there flowed
Too similar a stream (although so noble)

Without the prick antagonistical
Of nature's crossings. Two ungrateful sons
Disgraced the union. As their partisan
The tortured dam tortured the tortured sire.
But he lived faithful to that bitter ice
While yet there was no other who aroused,
In his clean, seemingly unexigent
And even frigid temper, fateful fire
That smouldered at his vitals. When, at length,
After long years of hunger at the heart,
He met Aspasia, I had once again
To get acquainted with my lifelong friend.
I knew him at the root, the stalk, the bud,
But not yet in the fragrant blossoming,
And least of all the rich and luscious fruit.
Love now revealed him. But it was not love
In the mere carnal sense, by any means,
Though that no doubt played an important part
In their relation; it was magic, sheer,
The sorcery of soul and intellect,
Which joined with sense to conquer the whole man
His feeling for Aspasia is a pure —
Shall I say passion? No! — consuming flame;
Consuming, yet exhaustless, ever rising
From its own ashes, its own phoenix-pyre.

The ground is far less sure to stand upon
In fixing her respondent love for him.
A woman is a mystery, no doubt,

Always, to us, as men — a major part
In her attraction for our enterprise
Perhaps; but in Aspasia there is more
Of female mystery, proportionate
To her transcendence of attractiveness.
She is as much a man as Pericles,
In mind and free initiative. She chose
As freely and as finally as he,
And with much more experience of life,
When she took Pericles and he took her —
Theirs is true love, the choice was mutual.
But his out-go to her is all his powers
Fused into one, and quite inseparable;
In hers to him is more of estimate.
Though she adores him as her lord of life,
There still is something of good judgment there;
Which does not interfere at all with passion,
But rather stimulates and edges it.
He holds her yet as with a cord of will
And intellect, not first with bonds of love.
There is a difference! She is one of those
Creative women who dare break the chain
Of all convention and pursue their course
As free as any man — and freer too,
For free men still have shackles; she has none
Except the ones she forges for herself.

Between her and my mother is a tie
Many are much amazed at. And indeed

Their lives have been as different as lives
Well could be; but reverse their circumstances,
And life might well have turned them right about,
And of the free companion made a dame,
The dame a free companion. They are like
In the essentials of a womanhood
That strength of character and open mind
Have liberated from a galling yoke.
Fashion considers it dismaying proof
Of my great mother's magnanimity,
That she confers uncondescending care
Upon Aspasia; but my mother's view
Is that she is her peer in privilege.

No-one in all our circle lends such charm.
You may not think her handsome, just at first.
A personal, alert self-confidence
Throws back her beauty to the second plane.
It is but when you know her that emerge
Those subtle flickers of the flame of soul
Which melt the strange allurement of her face
Into appealing softness. And she is
A creature of sharp contrasts — black and white —
Her face a silver moon in summer night;
Her eyes a summer night of mystic bliss
Where hovers the chaste soul of Artemis.
A beauty that has less to do with form
Than motive; and less statically true

Than in intent of the artificer,
Revealed but by expression.
She and I
Have found a basis of fine friendliness,
Rare between man and woman; wholly free
From any implications of a stir
Of warmer feeling — which, should it awake,
Were straight inhibited by loyalty.
I know of other instances, as well,
Of such a friendship — friendships that reveal
How love can separate as utterly
As love can join together.
Myron's eye
Rests like a benediction on our friendship —
A phase of life that has his interest,
And much appeals to one whose own love turns
About the pivot of progenitor.
He often has discussed with me the theme:
If it were possible — a love all soul,
Devoid of earthly passion; if it were
(Granting it possible) a hopeful thing
And procreative, making for new growth
In later generations of the soul,
As mortal parenthood goes on and on
In children's children's life unendingly.
And, too, that other question which we Greeks
Begin to canvass, blindly, gropingly:
Is there for each of us a chosen mate —
Chosen by nature — for our other half,

The perfect fit and complement to each,
Which yet men rarely find? I can recall
That evening walk in Corinth, years ago,
When he propounded to our friends' Sextet
That question's endless fascination. He,
Of all men, staunchly holds the theory
That each of us has somewhere one true mate
If we could but discover her in time;
To search for and to find her our whole life
Is an adventure. Myron's find had seemed
Almost an afterthought, so carelessly,
As one of many, he had found his love,
Strengthened to permanence by fatherhood.
A very true and rich relationship
Has Myron's been, richer than most of those
That I have ever seen, which he has held
Always as anchorage and harbour-home,
Though wanderer by taste inveterate.
And yet perhaps he has been capable
Of even finer things than he has known;
For I have seen his soul go forth to soul,
In friendship such as I have touched upon,
Where loyalty — a double bond of life,
To friend, to spouse — was all that stood between
Great happiness and heavenly ecstasy. —

These later years have been an enterprise
Freighted with fortune of full Attic life
On depth and urgence of a tidal stream.

To our home circle, covering the town
With close-knit social meshes, we have drawn
The glinting harvest of the teeming flood;
And life — for us, at least, who trolled — has seemed
To circle round our sailing, ours the helm.
But we have grounded! — and explainably:
Our draught is deep for even Athens' stream;
Or rather say our spars have caught the clouds,
And snagged us for too heavenly a reach. —

Why (do you ask?) do the Athenians
Look so askance upon our coterie?
There might be many answers; but I think
A quite sufficient one, all politics
Aside, is our free-thought. It were worth while
To seek to trace completely all the streams
To sources of our thinking — if indeed
One possibly could do so. Aeschylus,
Speaking but for myself, is fountain-head
(Whence he derives, no knowing); for he had
A very penetrating influence
Over my childhood. He was quite as close
To my two parents as am I today
To Pericles and to Aspasia; or —
As Myron to my loved one and myself:
Held by the bonds, invulnerably strong,
Of an impassioned friendship and a friendly passion.
After my father died there was no man
Buttressed so much my family, and me.

His mind was there, above, around, and through,
All of my childhood. Violent, austere,
He had a heart, which I discovered first
At Marathon; and it was from that night
I first began to feel him my close friend.
He stood, and all the world knew how he stood,
For freedom of conception of the gods.
You know his final difficulties, when,
In answering the charge Impiety,
He went free solely through Ameinias
His brother, who besought the lenience
Of the high court, not because Aeschylus
Was innocent, but for his own right hand,
Lopped off at Salamis. He raised his arm,
All handless as it was, in mute appeal,
As if to say: "I gave this hand of mine —
And must I lose my brother too? Forgive!"
And Aeschylus was pardoned; but he bore,
From that time on, the stigma of a man
Only not spat upon. He soon withdrew,
Though still staunch-hearted, quitting home for good
To end his days abroad. From time to time,
However, he came on to see my work
While I was at Olympia, and gave
Me heart to push my superhuman task
To a conclusion. Of all nourishment
My mind has ever had, outside my art
(And, for that matter, in it too, perhaps),

Count Aeschylus the richest. He it was
That liberated me. And the small group
Of fine, free spirits who supported him
Have kept together, and have clustered here
Around me, forming thus the nucleus
Of our society — a honey strained
And purified into transparent gold
From clouded comb of Athens.

Of us all,
Aspasia is the most free-minded one.
She too has had to answer for her thoughts,
Accused of not believing in the gods.
Hers too has proved an unretrenching soul,
And she still stands marked out for buffetings,
Though blows are tempered to her womanhood
A little, just a little.

All of us,
If you could sift town-thinking thoroughly,
Are, I suppose, the objects of suspicion:
We are a band of intellectuals.
I have the great advantage of the town
To see the inside, not the outside only,
Of our enfranchisement; though I can do,
Placed as I am, but little to allay
The envy and distrust. I even fear
I am the most suspected one of all —
I who by function am so set on high,
A spectacle by reason of my rôle,
Regardless of my feeling.

Ah, dear friend,
This loneliness of office! I would lose
Gladly — oh so, so gladly! — all my rank,
If I could yield it and still keep the task.
The task I would not yield except to force.
And isolation on the pinnacle
Of intellectual and social pride —
How gladly would I abdicate from it
To live again the life upon the farm,
A humble workman, if I might enjoy,
Along with poverty, the work I love,
The full companionship of kindred hearts,
And utter freedom of the intellect —
That sense of walking, open-eyed, with head
Uncovered to the sky, and lifted up
Into relationship with the divine!

We may not choose the circumstance of life
Our task shall be performed in, nor the task
That Fate shall sanctify to hand of ours.
Our chance for life is to take each his task,
To press from it some meaning to life's toil
And pass our meaning on to other men.
Oh, may my message be a mighty voice
So vibrant with the utterance of Zeus
That it shall pour its potence through my art
As through a trumpet unto all mankind
In revelation of beneficence!

ATHENS YET AGAIN

Today we draw the veil from Pallas' face
And give her to the world. I do not mark
A boundary between her virgin strength
And the mature and universal power
Of her immortal Sire for whom she stands
As witness of all young and strong-winged will
Outward and upward to the fullest use
Of the free mind — creative, militant.

We dedicate her image; but, to me,
It is the dedication of my life.

PHEIDIAS

EPILOGUE

PHEIDIAS

EPILOGUE

Pantarkes to the Sons of Pheidias

The celebration was magnificent.
Athens was overflowed with visitors;
The pomp of the Panathenaic games
Surpassed all precedent; the gorgeousness
Of the procession was superlative;
And Pheidias had never seemed so great
As at the head of the long-drawn-out line
Of all the Parthenon artificers.
Three architects together came on first —
Callicrates, Ictinus, Mnesicles;
Then next in line three sculptors — Colotes,
Alcamenes and Agoracritus;
Then all the following of each of them —
An endless sequence of the trades and crafts
That had contributed. I thought a town
Had emptied into the procession-stream,
Banked by the populace of the whole world,
With Pheidias high source and fountain-head.

The day had been a triumph. Came the hour
For the withdrawal of the lofty veil
That hung before the goddess — terminal

And climax of the dedication rites.
The temple nave was bursting with the crowd
Of the great dignitaries of the League
And the few others who were privileged,
Leaving an open space just adequate
For the high ceremony. Pheidias
Stood by the side of Pericles, aloof
A little from the priests and officers
Who took the active part, but full in view
Of the whole company — participants,
Though mute and passive actors in the scene.
Prayer was now offered; the libation drunk;
All waited breathless for the purple veil
To be withdrawn; at last the figure stood
Revealed in beauty and in sanctity.
The goddess' spirit was upon the throng,
Compelling worship. Silence long held on,
For none durst break the awe-inspiring spell. —

I stood beside a column at the end,
Where I could see, across the open space,
My friend and Pericles; behind them, close,
The awed, religious faces of the throng
Against the light that came from the east door;
And right above me, looming up the flare
Of many lamps into the dusk, the form,
The golden-gleaming form, the pale, pure face,
The starry eyes, of virginal Athena. —
And in the silence I became aware

That there were whisperers close by my side,
Who edged a little nearer, sharply peering
To scrutinize the figures on the shield
A-shimmer there beside the goddess' feet.
I heard one say: "It is his very face —
Do you not make it out? — the big bald man
Who lifts a stone above his head to hurl
Against his adversary Amazon.
It is the living face of Pheidias.
And Pericles alongside, though his face
Is hidden, half, behind his up-raised arm —
It is Olympius the Onion-head,
Quite unmistakably."
I saw the hand
Of him who whispered reach and point at those
Of whom he spoke. At once there was a stir,
As others, who had overheard, peered too
To see the likeness. And before the throng
Had much dispersed there grew a whispering
Like poplar leaves when storm-presaging winds
Frighten them pallid.
Then I heard again,
For the two speakers tarried in their place
To finger-guide the anxious comers' gaze:
"'Twas Menon here who was the first to see
The sacrilege. To him is credit due."

And in the temple twilight I beheld,
For the first time, that friend of Pheidias.

It was some time before the nave was cleared.
When Pheidias emerged with Pericles
Into the sunshine there were officers
Who asked that he attend the court that night
To answer to a charge of Sacrilege,
Preliminary hearing. But an hour
It wanted then before the sun would set. —

The judges sat at Areopagus,
The venerable court of Athens, held,
By ancient usage, in the open air,
Lest they who judge be tainted by the guilt
Of those they judge; and held too in the night,
Lest daylight colour guilt with sympathy.
I waited there for Pheidias to come,
For he had asked to have the hours alone
Between the summons and the hearing; hours
That grew to aeons while I waited him
Amid the gradually gathered throng,
Awed into silence. Many days have passed
Since that awed waiting, but the scene is still
Indelibly engraved upon my sight:

The yellow rock abruptly breaks the slope
Of the Acropolis, a tumbled cairn
Of boulders, jostled very anciently,
Perhaps, from off the beetling cliffs above,
Where clung, hardly less anciently, the town,
Now loosely scattered over slope and plain.

EPILOGUE

The rock of Areopagus is worn
And lichened with the ages. Steps, rough-hewn,
Climb the abraided seams, whose crannies hold
Crocus and thirsty grasses. Underneath,
The overhanging boulders are dissolved
And eaten into caverns, dreadful holes
That are the haunt of the Eumenides,
Ready to wreak the vengeance Fate ordains.
Beyond, but near at hand, the citadel —
Blocked, profiled, wrought, in marble and in bronze —
Looms awesome, beautiful, and fills the sky.
The sun has set, but still the evening air
Is vibrant with the lingerings of day,
Deep turquoise fading into amethyst.
The stars come out in wonder, one by one.
The moon, long hidden underneath the hill,
Begins at last to rime the parapet
And wash the loom of twilight wan and cold.
Torches are brought, and burnish the grayed scene
With flickering amber, copper, bronze and gold.
The judges, benched against the hanging rock,
Sit silent, hearkening to Pheidias:

ATHENIANS, I speak at your command.
The custom of this place is to divest
All speech of oratory, lest the heart,
Rather than reason, be appealed to. I

Shall speak thus simply, not for custom's sake,
But that I know not any other way.
I have no rhetoric. My words are plain,
And I rejoice that the occasion asks
No rivalry with those whose pregnant speech
Might make my cause seem empty, for default
Of high-wrought suasion. I can do no more
Than speak as man to man; and even so
I am not at advantage, for my tongue,
My native tongue, is sculpture; word of mouth
Seems at this time denied me. Be it so.
If there be gap between my tongue and yours
Bridge it by friendship; for I speak to friends.
I was born here among you. Yonder ledge,
A stone's throw hence, above the Clepsydra,
Gave couch room for my birth. And I grew up
Upon your doorsteps as upon my sires'.
There is no strangeness setting me apart.

Menon has testified that I am guilty
Of sacrilege; and your judicial eyes
Have seen the sculptures on which has been based
Impeachment. They are portraits — Pericles
The chief of state, myself the chief of works —
Which I am charged with having wrongfully
Wrought and displayed, in ivory on gold,
Amid the many on the goddess' shield,
Struggling Athenians and Amazons.
These you have seen. Your question is not, then,

Of fact, but of interpretation. That
Which you have seen, you now are here to judge.

I yield me to your reason and your will.
I am not come to offer an excuse
For what, if Menon's charge be proven true,
No words that I can say can hope to cure,
Nor mitigate the penalty. The gods,
Whose oracle you are in judging me,
Have delegated to you right to wreak
Their vengeance on me if you will it so,
Some brief and easy vengeance; but their will
Is everlasting, and not light to bear;
And though you find me guiltless, if their eyes
See guilt within my heart which you see not
In open deed, their vengeance I must bear
For evermore. — We cannot see ourselves:
I plead not innocence; my heart is full
Of wills and passions that I cannot judge
Because they are themselves the force that rules;
And I plead guilt no more than innocence;
I have felt awe, not guilt. But guilt, perhaps,
May sometimes masquerade as godliness,
With awe for blinders against godhead's fire.

We live in danger always of gods' wrath,
Not knowing whether we be right or wrong,
When we adventure in untrodden ways —
Such ways as I have much adventured in.

Upon this selfsame shield, where ancient art
Decreed strict zones in circles, one by one
Depicting wars in never-ending sequence,
I have abandoned sequence, and erased
All the concentric circles, to present
One martial moment over all the field —
One lawless moment lawlessly portrayed.
And in that scene of realistic strife
Two lifelike portraits are the question here.
Doubtless you have done well to bring it up;
Less you could not do, after Menon's charge.
Menon himself has hesitated long,
Surely, before he could accuse me here —
Wrought on too much at last by piety,
Longer to hold his brooded questionings.
But you judge, not between my friend and me,
But of my work, no matter who brought-in
The harsh indictment; yet not of the work
So much as of the principle: what work
In art is impious; where the metes and bounds
The artist must observe to gain the grace
Of the immortal gods by rapt attempt
To scale the heights of immortality,
And yet stop short this side of sacrilege. —

What was the deadly sin of Icarus?
That he wrought wings? or that with man-made wings
He out-soared manhood, and defied the god

As rival up the blue? The sin of pride
Is not the blossom but the seeded fruit,
One step beyond, in man, man's normal term;
The bloom seems man's, the ripened seed the gods';
There is no warning mark between the two:
This precinct human, that beyond divine.
How shall we mortals judge of Icarus?
To us his deed seems mighty, as conceived,
And wicked but in failure, if at all;
Consistent with the will of Phoebus' self,
Who bids us use the faculties he gives
To emulate his greatness. Icarus
Exceeded by some undefined degree
The selfsame law that Daedalus obeyed
In reason, and escaped; escaped, at least,
For that time, taking flight across the sea
From Minos' wrath, and luring Minos on
To tempt the gods himself by his excess,
And fall at last the victim of their wrath
While Daedalus rode still the wave of fate.
Our human justice had convicted him,
Not Minos, yet the gods decreed not so.
They sensed, with gods' precision, just the flaw
In Minos' skein of life, and snapped the thread.

And Daedalus at length met fate thus too.
Spared for so long upon the seas of life,
And sailing free, heedless of storm or shine,
But ever with his own star at the head,

Somehow at last he swept beyond the bound,
Offended, and was taken. All his life
He had gone on inventing, working out
Clues, and imagining solutions, even
Creating handicraft and art from sheer
Procreant instinct. And the gods were pleased,
If we can judge from his long laughing life,
Always upon the verge of danger, yet
Always escaping; edging, edging on,
And feeling forward through the strain and murk
To some far form that lured, though he could not
Descry it clearly, for the mists of life.
Yet pushed he ever, ever on, a laugh
Upon his lips (how many of his deeds
Seem more like jest than earnest!) and with will
To beat a way against opposing winds
And treacherous cross-currents, to the free
And open ocean. Life, for him, was one
Fearless adventure; not all reasoned out
And coolly planned and figured, for not so
The artist finds his forms ideal. Life —
Life eager and creative — pricked him on
To tempt the unattainable. Within
His heart of hearts a spurring spirit worked —
His daemon — which controlled his course, and drove
Or held him, at its will, not his. And he,
Filled with the turmoil of that spirit, strove
All outward from within. Sometimes, I think,
He lost his bearings, and was tossed, a toy,

On overwhelming surges; then he laughed
For very joy of peril, feeling gods
Whirl irresponsible within his veins;
Again, cast anchor, took on freight, and settled
Deep, to the gunwale; but his instinct was
Always to venture, seeking to transform
The good he came by into better things.
He strove, not consciously, yet to an end
Surer for being all unconsciously
Within himself, his daemon.
Those crude forms
We know as Daedala were fearless feats
Of wonder when he made them, daring death
To compass self-expression. He who makes
Must dare. It is his very breath of life.
Because of peril shall he hesitate
When that's at stake which it were best to lose
Rather than not to try for? 'Tis the life
Of artistry to go yet on, yet on,
Along the path that leads at last to him
Who on Olympus dominates all things.

The god who makes is he who punishes.
It is Apollo's rivalry that gives
To art its zest. What wonder is it, then,
That one who drinks from that inspiring source
Must ever risk his punishment? The gods
Are jealous when a mortal treads their ground.
"Thus far," they rule; "come farther at your risk."

And to obey is easy for all those
Who ask but to be shown the place to stop;
But hateful for creators. They desire
Always to question all things. They make law,
Or want to make it, always for themselves —
They are no artists else. For, looking back
Over the way of men, one clearly sees
How each improver of our common things
Has lived beyond the range of his own time,
According to the laws himself ordained;
Offending in the same degree and sort
As he helped on the welfare of mankind in.
To drag his fellows nearer to the gods
He trespassed on gods' precinct — got his ground,
His purchase, for the dragging, at expense
Of his security, attempting deeds
Which deity reserves for deity.
Art's rôle is in the last analysis
Creative, and a superhuman part.

In the beginning it was thus the gods
Themselves became gods peradventure. Zeus
And all his brethren clambered to their thrones
By rashest usurpation. And the one
Who brought down fire from heaven for mankind,
Defying Zeus — Prometheus — grew a god
For later generations, at his side
Or only little lower than Zeus' self.
So Daedalus, from being man like us

And full of human feelings, for his act
Of daring godhead paid the penalty,
And by the price he paid became at last
A god himself. He gave himself for us,
Won our redemption by his sacrifice,
As, long before, Prometheus too had done
Upon the torture-cliff of Caucasus.
We live by those who cast out every fear,
As they by sacrifice were deified. —

I say these things of Daedalus, because
It comes upon my tongue to speak of him,
And not of me. Think not I rank myself,
In my own estimation, with the sire
Of artistry. I draw my life from him,
Nevertheless, and you must grant some claim
Of kinship and descent, to judge my acts.
You cannot separate his blood in me
From his tradition, for they are one life.
And I am only one of a great line.
I speak for artists, and for all of them.

The seed of Daedalus are doomed to pay,
For freighted forwardness, the price of life
In some form, in some measure. But the gods,
And they alone, possess the breadth of view
That is required to judge these things aright,
And as to relevance to their own realm.
To you they delegate the right to judge

But of their bearing in the realm of men.
Usurp not their prerogative. Err not
In a like way of overweening pride
As it is charged that he you judge has erred in.
Ask not if I have done offence to gods
In their own godhead — which if I have done
It is their function fully to avenge —
But whether I am guilty of offence
By false example to my fellow men,
To wean them from their love or loyalty,
To cheapen or debase their sense of God.

The gods are ever near us, very near;
They see and hear us; but because mankind
Nor sees nor hears them, they seem far away,
Shapeless, forbidding, and mysterious.
I have essayed to make them real to men,
By sense of humanness in the divine.
My work bears witness they and we are kin.
We are the children of their spirit seed
And do their bidding when we look above,
Aspiring to the height we may not reach.
We share their being when we dare and will,
Not less, but more, than when we bow us down.

My wish has been to say these mystic things
In sculptor's language by my figure there,
As lover's signature, upon the shield
Of my supreme portrayal of the mind —

Free, daring, and forever unretrenched —
In attitude of militance against
The foes of Athens, as Athena's own,
And, as Athena's, foes of mind itself.
A lover's signature, yet something more,
Are Pericles and I upon the shield:
Ex-voto offerings of him and me,
Protectors of Athena's sanctity —
A dedication, not an act of pride.

If in your judgment I have done offence,
Be it yet mine, as son of Daedalus,
To offer on the altar of mankind
All that I am, as all that I have wrought,
That I be vehicle of God to man. —

When Pheidias had ended, silently
The people waited for the judges' word.
Some time they sat as if they had been struck —
Nay, stunned — by words beyond their comprehension.
Then, as a murmur grew among the throng,
Their eyes were turned to one another's eyes
And privy consultation clustered them.
Their words were soundless from my standing-place;
But I could see, and everyone could see,
That there was clash and heated argument.

At length they severed, and the president
Stood, as the voice of the concerted Bench.
I listened, stricken dumb, incredulous:
"Condemned to prison while awaiting trial."

And as the crowd dispersed I heard again,
Out of the darkness, as if Athens' self
Trusted its verdict to a single tongue,
The voice that I had heard that afternoon
Accusing Pheidias: "His very words
Are sacrilegious — claiming he is God;
Talking of Daedalus, Prometheus, Zeus,
As if he were their crony! Even so
He might omit instructing his own judges
As to their duties, laying down the law
To them, while vaunting his own lawlessness.
I'll have to warn him, as his oldest friend,
To take another tack when he is tried,
And placate those who judge him, not insult
Their dignity, while showing all the time
How gods themselves resent his hardihood.
He should have stressed on art, not argument.
I've no desire of having him condemned,
But there's a principle involved. To me,
It is most painful to see Pheidias
So bandied by the town, and floundering
So helplessly with his defence. One thing,
And only one, he has to do: retract;
Erase his figure wholly from the shield

And offer sacrifice; eat humble pie,
Instead of boasting of recalcitrance." —

As you Athenians will well recall,
Over against the proper citadel,
Whose own rock spines up stiffly to the east,
But sags to westward in a lofty saddle,
There runs a second range from north to south
Between the Hill of Nymphs and Muses' Crown.
Where these two ridges join, the second dips
Down to the first one, in a little cliff,
In whose east face a cave is hollowed out
With rude square door and window openings,
From which there is a wide-extended view
Of spread-out Athens — the Acropolis
Filling the middle ground with majesty.
Into this prison Pheidias was flung
To fortify himself against his trial,
His august triumph ever in his view.

The night was clear as crystal, and the rock
Of the Acropolis stood loftily
Up into lonesome, azure scintillance.
The Parthenon's unearthly loveliness
Shone out, the exquisitely chiseled shrine,
House of Athena. Pheidias remained
A long time silent, gazing on the scene.
His friends, gathered about him, one by one

Retired. For each he had some special word,
Buoyant and kindly — not a thought of self,
Only desire to ease anxiety.

I was the last to say good-night. He asked
If he might have a drink. As I stepped out,
The keeper of the prison was in talk,
Some steps away, with someone whom I saw,
As I drew nearer, to be Menon. Wine
Stood by, in cups, ready for drinking. Menon,
On seeing me, excused his being there:
He had come up, although the hour was late,
To say to Pheidias some little word
Of friendliness; he surely must not think
His old friend Menon was less friendly now
Than ever; all would come out right at last;
But as the hour was late he would withdraw
And come some other time; would I convey
Regret and sympathy? —
I carried back
The cup of wine the keeper handed me,
And left it. Pheidias gave me good-night,
Bidding me not to worry: "All is well;
Athena will protect me, never fear." —

Next morning, when I came, I found him there
As if asleep upon his couch, but still —
No breath, no pulse. He died while in sweet sleep.

Upon his features was that joyous look
That like a lamp had lighted them in life. —

The keeper told me Menon brought the wine
That Pheidias had drunk. Fate had decreed
That I, the well-beloved, offer him
The draught of Lethe that the lifelong friend
And lifelong enemy prepared for him.

THE END

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